



LOS ANGELES ART COMMUNITY: GROUP PORTRAIT

Herbert Jepson

Interviewed by Marjorie Rogers

Completed under the auspices
of the
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.	
Interview History.	
TAPE NUMBER: I, Side One (May 27, 1976).1
Childhood influences on creativity--Backwoods upbringing--Permissive parental guidance: freedom to explore environment--Family history--Repressive early schooling--Early interest in drawing--Entering Chouinard Art Institute--Parents encourage artistic endeavors--Odd jobs while in school--First teaching assignment.	
TAPE NUMBER: I, Side Two (May 27, 1976).22
Chouinard Art Institute's educational methods--As meeting ground for innovative artists--Conservative classroom training--Mexican influence of David Siqueiros--European influence of Hans Hofmann--First commercial art experience in designing--Visiting Los Angeles art galleries--Desire to be an independent artist--First fine-art exhibit--Art styles of the thirties: American scene paintings.	
TAPE NUMBER: II, Side One (June 3, 1976).	43
The art of Millard Sheets: industry oriented--Jepson joins Otis Art Institute staff--Reasons for leaving Otis--Interest in mechanical gadgets--Summer at the Chicago Art Institute--Role of art education--Wartime job at Lockheed--Beginnings of the Jepson Art Institute.	
TAPE NUMBER: II, Side Two (June 3, 1976).	61
Early instructors of the Jepson Institute --Administrative duties--Move of Institute --Recruitment of teachers.	

[Second Part] (June 10, 1976)	70
Jepson Art Institute's experimental approach --Art as reflection of nature--Art as heightened awareness--Professional and personal relationship with Rico Lebrun.	
TAPE NUMBER: III, Side One (June 10, 1976)	77
Brain experiments and creativity--Jepson's children--Stress and creativity--Reflections on artistic process--Education as develop- mental--Curiosity essential to art.	
TAPE NUMBER: III, Side Two (June 10, 1976)	97
Change essential to human behavior-- Children need stimulation--Subjective versus objective education--Active versus passive education--Intensity in art-- Reward in education--Sensitivity to art-- Closing the Jepson Institute--Divorce-- Successful Institute students--Conflicts among teachers.	
TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side One (June 17, 1976)	119
Howard Warshaw's teaching methods--Formal versus informal techniques--More on brain research--Whole-person education--Milly Rocque's teaching methods--Walt Disney animators--Disney's support for the Chouinard Art Institute--Illustrious Jepson Institute students.	
TAPE NUMBER: IV, Side Two (June 17, 1976)	138
Relationships with famous artists-- Activities after close of Jepson Art Institute--Veterans Administration pupils --Motivation for closing Jepson Institute --Coming to Otis Art Institute--Peter Voulkos as teacher--John Baldassari as student and artist--Voulkos's ceramics.	
TAPE NUMBER: V, Side One (June 24, 1976)	159
Wife's artistic talent--Rigidity in education--Proper learning process--Attitude	

toward museum and gallery operations--
Identification with object of study.

TAPE NUMBER: V, Side Two (June 24, 1976). 176

Museum's role in the community--Public
support for art schools--Revolution in
contemporary art--Dispersion of Los
Angeles museums and galleries--Shifting
locations of local art schools--Influence
of art critics--Interest by elderly in art.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side One (July 1, 1976). 194

Leaving Otis for Chouinard--Chouinard's
instructors--Proposed Council on Research
in Art Education--Dean Gerald Nordland of
Chouinard--European versus American art
students--Chouinard's students of the
thirties versus those of the sixties.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, Side Two (July 1, 1976). 213

Jepson as a teacher--Conceptual analysis
of art--Egocentrism of contemporary artists
--Avant-garde art--Current detachment of
artist from society--Drugs and the artist
--Sculpturing in plastics, unique to Los
Angeles.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side One (July 8, 1976). 233

Role of city in shaping artist's behavior:
San Francisco versus Los Angeles--One-man
shows--Worldwide exhibits of Southern
California artists--Connor Everts's
political involvements--His outlandish
art projects--Rebellion against authority
--Decay and growth in art--Active learning
--California art influenced by imitations.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, Side Two (July 8, 1976). 253

College of Design in Pasadena--Superficial
relationship between local artists and
their environment--Role of color in Southern
California art--Primary influence of Mexican
art in the thirties--Experimenting with
different media--Physical danger in working

with new materials--Criteria for
evaluation of good art--More on the
closing of Chouinard.

TAPE NUMBER: VIII, [video] (August 28, 1976). 274

In the home: Jepson's concept pieces--
The Jepson family beach retreat--Elena
Canavier's prints--Women in the art
scene--Activities after leaving Chouinard
--Experimenting with plywood, steel, and
sound--Trip to England--Personal collection
of artists' models--His collection of
antiques--Studying Bernini's style--Contacts
with local universities--Exploration as
key to art process.

Index. 304

INTRODUCTION

Herbert Samuel Jepson was born on June 6, 1908, in Fieldbrook, California to Herbert Henry Jepson and Mary Elizabeth Irwin in the living quarters of a general store which his father managed. Jepson was raised in rural surroundings--in Fieldbrook until the age of five, and then in Glendale, where he acquired a love for nature from his father who worked as a nurseryman and tree-moving contractor. By giving his son freedom to roam the hills and fields around Glendale and by permitting him the use of his woodworking tools, Jepson's father stirred in his son a curiosity to develop his capabilities while investigating the artistic dimensions of natural materials. Both factors proved important to Jepson's later success as a designer and wood sculptor. However, on entering public school he encountered a traditional educational approach of reward and punishment which caused him to lose interest in learning--a bitter memory for Jepson--and which stood in marked contrast to the spirit of inquiry and exploration at home. Only an early fascination with drawing sustained his sense of identity and creative urge.

Jepson received a tuition scholarship to the Chouinard Art Institute in 1926, where he became acquainted with fellow students Millard Sheets and Don Graham. Both men would later influence the course of his career--Sheets as director

of the Otis Art Institute in 1954, and Graham as chairman of the Chouinard faculty in 1958. In his third year at Chouinard, he was chosen as teaching assistant to F. Tolles Chamberlin. When Chamberlin resigned during the summer session, Mrs. Nelbert Chouinard asked Jepson to continue instructing the class. By 1929 he had achieved some recognition as a fine artist by receiving second prize for a piece entered in the California Water Color Society Show at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. As a commercial artist he painted circus carnival banners at nights and on weekends. Mrs. Chouinard therefore decided to continue his appointment to the faculty for another school year. Jepson taught drawing classes three days a week and night classes for student trainees sent to Chouinard by Walt Disney.

When in 1930 his teaching contract at Chouinard was not renewed, Jepson concentrated almost exclusively on his commercial art work. An early assignment was to design and construct furnishings for outdoor miniature golf courses. He later opened a custom-made furniture business in Beverly Hills, which failed due to stiff competition from sale of mass-produced items. His financial problems were further compounded by his marriage to Guilia Smith and the birth of their first child, Neil (other children from this union were Nicholas and Lynne).

In the summer of 1933, while in Chicago on an unsuccessful business venture, Jepson decided to attend the

Chicago Art Institute. He also broadened his vision of art by visiting art departments in the Midwest to assess their educational methods. He wrote to Mrs. Chouinard of his expanding interest in art education, and in response she invited him to teach at Chouinard, which he did at the end of 1934. More than his own accomplishments during this period, Jepson remembered the stimulation received from continued contact with Lawrence Murphy--his first drawing teacher at Chouinard--and with visiting teachers Hans Hofmann, Alexander Archipenko, and David Siqueiros.

World War II interrupted Jepson's association with Chouinard, and he aided the war effort by joining Lockheed Corporation as a toolmaker in 1942. He eventually proposed and designed several timesaving devices for which he received bonuses and an advancement to senior tool designer in the tool engineering department. This extra money enabled him to consider seriously the prospect of opening his own art school.

In 1945 he established the Jepson Art Institute in cramped quarters located across from the already famous Otis Art Institute and a few blocks from Chouinard. Beginning with only three instructors, the student body and distinguished faculty grew rapidly in size and reputation, requiring a move to larger quarters on Seventh Street. Such illustrious figures as Rico Lebrun, Howard Warshaw, William Brice, and Guy McCoy were among the energetic

staff Jepson guided according to his philosophy of open, experimental education. The institute became a fertile ground for emerging artists in Los Angeles. Jepson proved to be an adept administrator, able to resolve conflicts among faculty, increase enrollment, and publicize the institute; but bureaucratic tangles with the Veterans Administration, financial problems resulting from his divorce, and declining enrollment due to the Korean conflict caused Jepson finally to close the doors of the institute in 1953.

The institute was important to Jepson not only because it afforded him the opportunity to expand his ideas concerning the influence of formal art education on creativity but also because he met his second wife, Marcia Shlaudeman, who became an artist in her own right. They had two children, Elena and Stephen (who received his MFA from Otis Art Institute in 1978).

After a brief association with the Kahn Art Institute in 1953 and 1954, Jepson was invited by Millard Sheets to head the drawing department at Otis Art Institute. Disappointed that he did not receive any salary increase after four years, Jepson left Otis abruptly in 1958 to rejoin Chouinard and remained there for the next twelve years.

Jepson was enthusiastic over this new appointment because he encountered a young, vibrant faculty of his



former students. These included Robert Irwin, Richards Ruben, Fred Hammersly, Robert Chuey, John Canavier, and Milly Rocque. In addition, Jepson thought that the Chouinard Art Institute was more interested in expanding art vistas, whereas the Otis Art Institute was too pre-occupied with practical application. Some of Jepson's notable students were Tom Wudl, Joe Goode, Larry Bell, Charles Arnoldi, Guy and Laddie Dill, Edward Ruscha, and Douglas Wheeler. During this period, Jepson produced a film entitled The Art of Drawing, which captured one of his class sessions at Chouinard; the film was later distributed throughout the United States. Jepson drew far more satisfaction from this association with Chouinard than from his earlier contact because he saw students of the late fifties and early sixties more closely pursuing his ideal of open, innovative art study. These pupils were searching for new directions and ideas and were not content to accept unquestioningly the authority of academic programs.

In 1970 the Chouinard Art Institute became the California Institute of the Arts and moved to Valencia. Jepson left the staff and continued to work in his studio across from MacArthur Park. True to his belief that art should be continuously innovative, he experimented with formed plywood sculpture.

After three years of studio work, Jepson felt the



need for change and took his family to London where he conducted a rigorous search in scientific journals for clues to an organic basis for human creativity. He also pursued his hobby of collecting baroque bozzetti, particularly those of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, several of whose pieces now decorate Jepson's home.

After returning to Southern California, Jepson occupied his time as a guest lecturer, occasionally giving talks to university classes now conducted by his former students. He also began writing a book on art education which focused on the importance of stimulation and awareness to creative activity, especially the role of developmental growth and health of brain cells. Indeed, Jepson viewed stages of his own history as ever-increasing periods of enlightenment during which he deepened his recognition of the potential function of the arts in education.

The underlying theme of this oral history is that creativity in art is a process which should be measured by the degree of one's total commitment to expanding creative energies. Such expansion would tap unrealized emotional strength which would be harnessed to increase mental growth. The ideal climate for healthy art education, in Jepson's estimation, is one in which a person overcomes the reductive restraints of traditional art skills and methods and stimulates his whole physical



and imaginative being to create not only new works of art but also a more fulfilled individual. According to these standards, Jepson feels that most contemporary artists do not foster inclusive, unitary views of themselves and do not know how to become actively involved in the rigorous self-rewarding discipline of art as an extension of those selves. In contrast, Jepson believes that truth, artistic or otherwise, lies not so much in what a person has achieved, but in his inborn potential for growth, change, and further realization.

Stephen Stern



INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER: Marjorie J. Rogers, Editor-Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program (for "Los Angeles Art Community: Group Portrait"). BA, Art, University of California, Los Angeles.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Places: Herbert Jepson's apartment, 11767 Sunset Boulevard, Los Angeles, and his home, 204 Seascape, Rancho Palos Verde [video session].

Dates: May 27, June 3, 10, 17, 24, July 1, 8, August 28 [video session], 1976.

Time of day, length of sessions, and total number of recording hours: Interviews began in the early afternoon and lasted until late afternoon. Sessions were approximately three hours in length. Eleven and one-half hours were recorded.

Persons present during interview: Rogers and Jepson. Mrs. Marcia Jepson responded on a few occasions when queried by Mr. Jepson but was not present in the room. She was also present during the video taping, in addition to video camera operator Nancy Olexo and crew.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW:

The interview was structured chronologically, with the interviewee encouraged to contribute anecdotes. The subject, anxious that the record be accurate, used prepared notes during the recording sessions. The interviewer researched the history of the art schools with which the subject had been affiliated. His experiences as an instructor and founder of the Jepson Art Institute were dealt with in detail as well as his philosophy of art education.

EDITING:

Editing was done by Lawrence Weschler, Assistant Editor, Oral History Program. He checked the verbatim transcript against the original tape recordings and edited for punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, and verification of proper and place names. Words or phrases introduced by the editor have been bracketed. The final transcript remains in the order of the original taped material.



Mr. Jepson reviewed and approved the edited transcript, making minor deletions and additions and assisting in providing names not previously verified.

The index was compiled by Lawrence Weschler. Joel Gardner, Editor, Oral History Program, reviewed the edited transcript before final typing. The introduction was written by Stephen Stern. Front matter was prepared by the Program staff.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings, video tape, and edited transcripts of the interview are in the University Archives and are available under regulations of the University.

Records relating to this interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

[Photograph of Herbert Jepson by Nancy Olexo]

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

MAY 27, 1976

ROGERS: Mr. Jepson, we're going to be discussing some of your biographical material this afternoon, and I know you have some feelings about a man's background and how it influences him. Would you like to comment on that first?

JEPSON: Well, it's only recently that I've been thinking about this, mainly because of the interview. My thoughts about the beginning, or how we develop, how our creativity develops, has always been my concern, but it's only recently that I've been thinking about how a person's childhood background affects their ability to perform, to do creative work, or to produce works. Consequently, the early beginnings seem to be increasingly important to me--not for myself, as much as it has been for just my concern for students in general, having worked with students at the college age all those years. When I think back, I have to say that their prior conditioning had so much to do with their inability to expand and to grow, it would seem to me that this early beginning, the thing that happens in school during our formative years, is of vital importance to them later on. Now, my background and my schooling is not too different from anybody else's. But, nevertheless, as I go along, I'd like to make comment from time to time about how I feel this might have affected what came later or how restrictive

conditioning in school retarded my own development, the kind of things which happened to me, which seemed to have made it take so long for me to catch on to the fact that essential features of life and mental growth are being repressed in schools everywhere. And although I've always been in the arts and my interests have been in developing my own creativity, as the term is generally used--it's a vague term, but developing it in myself and in my students--in trying to do this, I've done a lot of reading and thinking about the innate exploratory drive for stimulation of nerve-energy needs for growth, and recently I've been writing about brain cell changes in response to experience in the arts. I haven't solved what effect my background may have had on me. As I look back on it now and think about it, I'm not too sure about a lot of things. I'm not sure whether my life was foreordained to be the way it was, or whether it was heredity or the way I was nurtured, let's say, by my environment.

I was born on June 6, 1908, at six o'clock in the morning. People who are interested in numerology attach a lot of importance to that. I can't say exactly why, although recently I ran into some seventeenth-century art history research that I've been doing which the number six seems to have been of extreme importance in biblical literature. It had something to do with the sign of the beast and the

number of man in the Book of Revelation. I don't know exactly what that means. Anyway, I've had to dig into the kinds of religious thoughts that were affecting the arts in the high Renaissance and in baroque periods.

I was born in Fieldbrook, California, in the back of a general store and post office in this little town that is really at the end of the road in a backwoods. I looked at a map a few years back, and it would seem that it's still the end of the road in the backwoods because it's the road that ended against the mountains. I guess redwoods are still being milled from back in there.

The only other town building was the saloon. There were some small homes built around among the tree stumps--you might say that my roots were here. Since we left there very early, I have no recollection of the place except from what my father and mother said about it and from photographs of that period. I think that there was a schoolhouse. My oldest brother and my oldest sisters were going to school in a logging camp that was down the road a mile or so away. They had a schoolhouse there for children of the lumberjacks and loggers that were working in the backwoods.

My father was a man who always said he was a "jack-of-all-trades and master of none." Most of the time he worked in the outdoors. That period during which he was the postmaster and a storekeeper there [Fieldbrook, California] was the only

period where he worked inside. Before he moved north, he had been a nurseryman, and when he came back he worked with trees in various ways. He was a tree-moving contractor. But the only thing that seemed to be of any significance to my development was the fact that he let me wander around the store--as he told it, because I can't remember this--and he said that I was constantly moving the merchandise around and mixing nails in the barrels and things of that kind. You know, they had barrels of nails in the hardware part of the little country store. And I think that background, that kind of permissiveness, if you will, allowed me to explore and to manipulate things, and later on to work with his tools--which sometimes annoyed him no end because I was constantly losing them, leaving his tools outdoors and so on. But the fact that they allowed me to do that probably was an important factor in my development because many studies show that environmental stimulation is as important as nutrition on early development. Clinical examples of physical and mental retardation of children deprived of stimulation show this to be true. Manipulativeness, which stems from the innate drive for stimulation of nerve-energy needs, seems to be a basis of creative intelligence. Perhaps we shouldn't talk about creativity because it seems to be such a vague term, and it seems to be so variously expressed. It can involve manipulation of symbols and symbolic forms of the highest



order and so on. It can be an extremely complex kind of innovative thought--some of the most beautiful things are a combination of very simple elements. In any case, this seemed to be characteristic of their treatment of me.

As I recall, as a child I was never restrained. I could explore; I could go where I wished. We moved to Glendale, California, when I was four and a half years old, but fortunately we lived on the outskirts of the city, and at that time it was pretty open country. We always had a cow, chickens, and a horse which my father used in his work moving trees and so on. And I was allowed to explore and to go where I wished, and all my mother would say was be sure to be home for lunch or be sure to be here at dinnertime. That was about the only limitation. I was never chided, particularly, for not appearing earlier. So I think that this was a very important thing in my life, as I think back upon it. It seemed to be very much a part of my nature to want to get out and hike in the hills around Glendale. As I remember, as a child I never liked staying in the house--I really couldn't stand that too much.

I graduated from Glendale Union High School. I went from first grade through the high school in Glendale.

ROGERS: Didn't you . . . [phone rings; tape recorder turned off] Before we go on with your education in Glendale, I'd like to go back up to Fieldbrook for just a minute. Can you

tell about your father and his background? Was he born up in that part of the country?

JEPSON: No, my father was born in Sioux City, Iowa. My grandfather had been a college graduate. He graduated from college, and then he went into the service in the Union army during the Civil War. And after the Civil War, he had a commercial photographic studio in Sioux City, Iowa. So he was an early professional photographer. I suppose, like a lot of people, he got the idea that going west was the way to get rich, so they moved to Fillmore, California, in 1876. My father was only six years of age then, so he spent most of his life here in California.

Although his father had gone to college, my father only went through the ninth grade in school--my mother, also. He met my mother here in Los Angeles, where she lived in an old adobe ranch house in what is now Griffith Park. I think his father was sort of crippled with arthritis or something of that kind, and although he lived to be a very old man, it seemed to fall upon my father to support the family. He had three sisters and one brother, who was older but who seemed to be scholastically inclined, so my father sent him and one of his sisters through college. But I think it was a relatively simple thing to do then, and I could imagine that at least his brother contributed, probably, to his own care and keep. I don't think it was such a big

deal, really. I only bring that up because they both became teachers, and one of them was the principal of a grammar school in Orange County; my aunt was a schoolteacher. She's still alive. She was the youngest of the family, and my father was the next to the oldest.

ROGERS: And what were your mother's roots?

JEPSON: Well, my mother was born in Illinois. I don't know too much about the background. I know there was a lot of talk about an uncle or a great-uncle Springer, on her mother's side of the family, who had owned the land on which the city of Wilmington, Delaware, was built. There was a great deal of talk about that because in or around 1805 he had leased the land for ninety-nine years, and during the ninety-nine years this entire city was built upon it, including the principal factory of the du Pont company. So there was some talk about that. The family was sort of getting excited about the idea that their claim to the land might be settled. But it was settled very simply; they burnt the city hall down with all the records of not only the original lease, which happened to be there, but also of subsequent tenants and people who had bought land that had a cloud over the title and so on. So nothing ever happened to the suit. I remember my grandmother on that side, but only very vaguely. And I don't recall ever seeing or knowing the grandfather on that side of the family. The other grandfather (Jepson) I do remember

quite well, because it seemed to me he lived until he was about eighty-five years old.

ROGERS: That was Grandfather Jepson?

JEPSON: Grandfather Jepson.

ROGERS: And do you know what his extraction was? Was he from Europe?

JEPSON: Well, there's a Jepson, one of his direct ancestors, I think, probably his great-grandfather, maybe his grandfather, I don't know--these things It's amazing how time goes. When you think that my father arrived in California 100 years ago this year at six years of age. One of the direct ancestors of the family, the name Jepson is on a plaque in a church in China Lake, Maine. He was an abolitionist minister at a church there, and the only thing that is known about it is that it was the main trail for people that were on the run to Canada to escape the authorities before the Revolutionary War. A lot of the first settlers were bond servants--slaves, really--that were shipped from England. I don't know whether there were any blacks that were coming up through there, but there were others who were escaping into Canada, and he was a part of that underground. So they say. [laughter]

But both my grandfathers were in the Civil War, and both fought for the North. And the only comments that I can ever recall my grandfather making was, "Those darn Democrats!"

This is what he called the Southerners. They were "rebels" or they were "Democrats" most of the time because, I suppose, he was a Republican.

ROGERS: You didn't mention your mother's and your father's name--just for the record would you like to?

JEPSON: Oh, my father's name was Herbert Henry Jepson, and my mother's name was Mary Elizabeth Jepson. Her maiden name was Irwin.

ROGERS: And how many brothers and sisters did you have?

JEPSON: Well, my mother had six children. The first son died at eighteen months, so that was before my time, and I have one brother who is still alive--twelve, fourteen years older than I am. And I also have two sisters that are still alive. One sister died in childbirth when I was just a teenager. So my mother had six children; five of them survived to adulthood.

ROGERS: Do you know what the circumstances were of your father leaving the lumber camp and coming down to Glendale?

JEPSON: I think the climate got the best of him, you know, having been raised in Southern California. Fieldbrook is just inland from the coast, not too far in, maybe around seventeen miles, I think, from Eureka, which is on the bay there in Humboldt County. And that's a very damp, marine climate. As I understand it, it must be much like it is in London; it's damp and drizzles all the time. My father used

to say it even rained when there were no clouds in the sky-- the water was still coming down. And he didn't like that. Now, whether he began to get ill or something, I don't know, but they decided that they would come back to Southern California. My mother, I can imagine, probably instigated it; she didn't really want to live in the country. So my father managed to keep us kind of on the edge of Glendale.

We lived on the street called Lincoln Avenue, which happened to be the last street, right on the border between Glendale and Eagle Rock, and, at that time, as I say, we had cows and chickens and goats, and I don't know what else. We even had a pig for a while. It was sort of a farmlike environment, because as a young boy I used to do chores around the place. We had, oh, about a half a square block of land that we used for our garden. We always had plenty of food, although there were times when we didn't have much else. My father never made a lot of money, but we always had a roof over our heads and plenty to eat. We never had any trouble that way. And I worked tending that garden and cultivating the ground and things of that kind when I was very young.

ROGERS: Your experiences in school, after being so free and being able to . . . ?

JEPSON: I think that my experience was no different from the average child. I think the trauma, the shock of having to be quiet, sit still and do those dull, nonstimulating and

repressive exercises that are so restrictive, demanding--a kind of convergent thinking, reinforced by reward-punishment conditioning which causes anxiety and blocks stimulation of nerve-energy needs--is disaster for all children. So I would have to say I was a very mediocre student throughout school. I hated it. I despised it from the day I was in there, probably more so in the first year than any other period. We happened to have one of those old witches--and I can see her yet--who was enforcing her rules and regulations with an eighteen-inch ruler that she would hit us with.

And I think this really comes to something that has interested me very much recently. Children up to six years old are intensely curious and eager to learn, have tremendous tacit knowledge. They can't verbalize it necessarily, but they are very aware, very sensitive to a lot that's going on. They are able to read and understand other people's emotional attitudes and their responses to each other. Their gestures come closer to what the person's true but sometimes unconscious feelings are than does the spoken word. And they understand a lot, not only about life generally but about things that active schooling should be about. But because of the restrictiveness of it, schools don't take this kind of background and this knowledge into account, because all the focus is on a kind of passive, detached thinking that requires that people learn fragmented things by rote. To me, it's a little bit

like trying to teach children to walk a mental tightwire, especially at that age. I've come to the conclusion that the easiest victims of passive conditioning are the brightest children. The ones that adapt the easiest appear to have the easiest time of it, and particularly the girls because they're less aggressive. Boys rebel more readily and are more antagonistic. Physically they are more energetic, and girls are generally more submissive. At least, they seem to get the reward or the awards that go with the stars, the good grades, the pats on the head, and so on. [laughter]

It would seem to me that the real fault lies in the reliance upon reward and punishment, which really falls back onto the defense conditioning of the more primitive part of the brain, although they are trying to develop a higher intelligence. Defense mechanisms in the lower primitive brain are really at the head of the brainstem. This fear-flight-or-fight mechanism is the subconscious cause of the anxiety that seems to be built into that kind of stick-and-carrot double-bind conditioning, which blocks stimulation and development of the rest of the brain. Even when they're rewarded, there is always the feeling of alienation and inferiority. It's well known that such feelings accompany the lack of motivation and may lead to personal suffering and chronic neurotic behavior.

So, in any case, I went through this kind of schooling for all those years, and I was just a mediocre student who

sort of scraped through but somehow had enough ego or sense of my own worth to manage to keep going. It seems strange that a nonacademic person with no degrees would find himself so much involved with education as I have been-- not only have been, but [I] am still writing about the effects of an active education in the arts on mental growth and health. I'm not successful with publishing or anything like that. My wife, Marcia, thinks that perhaps some of this concern about education is just sour grapes, that I'm mad that I didn't maybe do better. [laughter] And I've been so slow in finding out in what I wanted to do. So that most of my early experience, both in art school and up to the time I had my own school, although I had lots of doubts and questions about education, I would look upon it as a kind of a continuation of this traditional idea that seemed to be a basis for the purpose of education: the idea that drill is good for you, that there are good habits and there are bad habits, and that practice makes perfect. It took me a long time to realize that concentrated practice can make you awfully dull to the point that actions are automatic without inner awareness of any kind. The exclusion of metaphorical mind functions of intuition and imagination in favor of "correct" responses which become automatic causes rigid stereotype ways of behaving and thinking.

ROGERS: I'd like to talk to you further about that when we

get into your school and your theory of education and drill. I wanted to ask you about your extracurricular activities in your high school days and in your junior high school days. Were you active in sports?

JEPSON: Yes, I went out for every sport there was, but I was an also-ran. I was always on the second team. I never did make the first team on any of those things in high school. Oh, I did in the grammar school. I was the pitcher on the team that won--I think we won the grammar school championship of Glendale when I was in fifth grade. But in the sixth grade I was on the school soccer team. I used to love sports, and I went out for everything that I could. I went out for track and football and basketball, baseball; and sometimes they conflicted so I couldn't do them all at once. But it was the same--I wasn't particularly adept at that kind of thing. I wasn't fast enough. My young daughter, Elena, who is now sixteen, is a star in every sport she goes into, but she's fast, and I'm a little bit slow. When I played football I was the second-team quarterback, and if I ever got away with the ball somebody always caught me from behind, and that hurts! [laughter]

ROGERS: When did you first notice that you had some leanings or feelings for art?

JEPSON: Oh, well, I started to draw as soon as I could get a pencil in my hand. I drew all the time--all the way through

school. I didn't do much of anything else but draw. I used to draw on the backs of my workpapers in the classrooms, so I was constantly drawing. The art classes were the only classes I got A's in, and when I was in high school ready to graduate, the art teacher told me she thought I should apply for a scholarship in Chouinard Art School in Los Angeles. And I didn't know anything about that. I had no background. My first question was, "Well, what is an art school like? What do they do there?" She said, "They're having a scholarship competition. I think you should apply." So I applied, and I won a scholarship to the Chouinard Art Institute. They gave two scholarships that year. A Japanese-American girl got the other scholarship in the design department. One of the teachers who was one of the founders of the school, F. Tolles Chamberlin, was responsible for getting me the scholarship. So art was something I thought I always wanted to do.

The kind of teachers we had in art classes in high school were trained in the field of general education, and we got very little instruction. But I got a lot of practice because I recall in--let's see, it would be in junior high school (they called it the intermediate school then; it was eighth and ninth grade, that's all)--we had assignments to do: make a drawing of a still life of

something. And then, when the assignment was completed, we could go out in the playground and play. So I would draw mine, and I would do my buddy's too, you see, so I got a lot of practice. I could do it so fast I could do his, too. [laughter] I was always very glib with a pencil.

ROGERS: What other sources of encouragement did you get for your art? How did your parents feel about it?

JEPSON: Oh, they always encouraged me. I always knew that I was the pet of the family. Although I was the next to the youngest, I was the boy; I always knew that I was the favorite, somehow. They laughed at all my jokes, and my father always saved all my drawings, and, you know, made notes--how old I was, whether I was four and a half when I did this drawing and when I was five years old and so on. So I had all the encouragement. But actually it wasn't a cultured background necessarily, although my mother was interested in poetry. But I think it was a Good Housekeeping-type poetry kind of thing. She was secretary of a poetry club in Glendale.

ROGERS: Did you go to the museum when you were in your teens?

JEPSON: I had been to the museum but, I think, probably spent more time looking at the stuffed animals than anything else, as I recall. But I had close friends,

an Italian family who were very poor. I think there were nine boys in the family, and their mother insisted that they go to all the operas in Los Angeles. She'd take the whole family, and that impressed me. I thought about it. Something seemed to be a little incongruous because they were so poor, and yet somehow, she managed to get tickets and get them to the opera. But the background and the country place Glendale in those days was really kind of a hick place--still is, to some extent, as far as I'm concerned. [laughter]

ROGERS: What were the circumstances, then, when you won your scholarship? How did you manage your living? Wasn't coming into the city quite an experience?

JEPSON: Oh, well, I had worked. My father was always good at getting jobs for me. He knew more people that wanted somebody to do work for them. So I got all the dirty jobs. I guess I was eight, nine years old when I took care of 125 rabbits for a year. I had to feed them in the morning before I went to school and work all day Saturday cleaning those hutches, they call them, and it was a dirty mess. So if I had any spending money, I had to get out and earn it myself. When I was fifteen [1923], they were rapidly subdividing the areas around us, and I got a job all summer long nailing sheeting on the roofs of these new tract houses they were building.

And then, I think right after that, I contracted to shingle the roof of a six-room house. I did it all by myself. So I'd always made a little money somehow.

When I was going to art school I had to take care of the gardening at a house in Hollywood and another one that was clear up above Glendale toward Montrose somewhere. It was kind of a large estatelike place, and I worked as a gardener after school. So to those two jobs I would go after school, two afternoons to one, then two to the other.

ROGERS: And this was when you were at Chouinard?

JEPSON: Yeah, that was my first year. The third year she [Mrs. Nelbert Chouinard] gave me a job. They had a custodian that lived in the back of a little house in the back of the property. The front room of the house had been made into a still-life painting studio. The custodian and his wife had moved, and so she gave me the job during my third school year. . . . My scholarship had been for only one year. The second year I needed more income. I only went to school half-day. I didn't have a scholarship, and I had to pay my own tuition--which wasn't so much; it was relatively very little, some fifteen or twenty dollars a month, I think.

I worked as a steam engineer and general handyman in a laundry. I took a simple examination and got a

steam engineer's license, so I could run those big steam boilers when the day-shift engineer left at three o'clock. So I worked that in the afternoons from two o'clock until ten o'clock at night in my second year, and in the third year I worked as a custodian in the school. I had to clean up after some 450 students there. I did that before and after school and Saturday mornings. I'd often have to get up at five o'clock in the morning and get in there. I did a lousy job of cleaning most of the time, I think. [laughter] But she paid me sixty dollars a month beside the tuition and a place to stay and so on. That's all I got for it. And then my fourth year in the school, I started out as a teaching assistant in the 1929 summer program. I was F. Tolles Chamberlin's teaching assistant in a class of fifty-five students. Mr. Chamberlin was a gentleman of the old school but not too efficient. He was always at least an hour, an hour and a half late, and he never talked at length to more than four or five people in the class. Sometimes he would talk for a few minutes to the whole class, but the rest of the time [he left it to] me to help him with the students. The majority of these students were school teachers who came there in the summer. The Los Angeles school system gave them credit for higher pay. After I had been helping him for half the summer, he got mad at Mrs. Chouinard

and quit. He was upset about her philosophy and the way the program was being arranged. Originally F. Tolles Chamberlin, Mrs. Chouinard, and a woman by the name of Patty Patterson started the Chouinard School. The three of them had been teachers at the Otis Art Institute when they decided to separate and start their own school. But Mr. Chamberlin quit without warning right in the middle of the summer session. And since there were only a couple of weeks left, Mrs. Chouinard said, "Well, you're doing very well in there. The people in there tell me that you're the only one that's helping them anyway, so you can go ahead and teach." And then she gave me my own class the following year. I was, I suppose, a teaching assistant. I think colleges are still doing that; they give teaching assistantships to students and then let them do the whole job. So I had three classes the following year. And she paid me very well--seemed like a lot of money to me at that point; it was fifteen dollars a day for a six-hour day. Oh, in addition, on Friday nights, I had a class of fifteen trainees from the Disney corporation. Walt Disney's studio was just beginning to boom, and he decided some of his trainees needed to take more drawing. He had no training program set up in his studios at that point, so he sent fifteen of those trainees over there on Friday nights,

and I taught drawing to those people during the year.

ROGERS: How do you remember Mrs. Chouinard?

JEPSON: A very fantastic lady. The name Chouinard is a French name. She had married an officer in the army in World War I. Whether he was killed during the war or died from wounds shortly after the war, I don't know, but he was never around. Her maiden name was Murphy. And she was a terrific fighter. I mean, I never knew anyone who was quite like her, really. She was really something of a monument in this city. I never agreed with her educational philosophy or policy, exactly; she just put anybody in she thought could teach most anything in art. If they could teach something, she would hire them, and she didn't care what their politics were.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE TWO

MAY 27, 1976

ROGERS: Mr. Jepson, you were talking about Mrs. Chouinard and her educational policy, and you said that she would hire just about anybody.

JEPSON: Yes, and as long as they seemed to be doing the job and were liked by the students, she would keep them on. As a result, the school just grew. I would always say it was a kind of funky place because of this kind of split that was always there between different teachers and so on. And there was no effort to integrate anything except in terms of subject matter. But her willingness to bring new people in became a very important thing in the development of the Chouinard art school, particularly in the thirties when she brought in people who were really innovators at the time. She had Hans Hofmann there--it seemed to be about 1930, '31. From time to time, she would go off, and she'd come back with a star from some school from Europe. She brought in a very famous European industrial designer. She would do this from time to time. And, as I say, it never seemed to bother her in any way that it didn't quite seem to fit. To her, they fit in as long as they were taking care of the students who happened to be in the class.

And the programs in the school were equally fragmented--very much like the thing that goes on in public schools and colleges where there's no real attempt to get totally involved with things. They just take survey courses that are smatterings of subjects. Some students were taking a half-day of this and then a half-day of something else. Other students would take it two days in a row. So there was no coherent unity to the program. It's very difficult to teach classes that way. If you know you're going to have the same students for two sessions, let's say two mornings, for example, it's easier to establish some sort of continuity. But it wasn't that way. Students were allowed to take any class, anytime, anyplace. The program was a hodgepodge which is symptomatic of the confusion about the purpose of education that can be seen in various forms everywhere. I do feel that kind of thing dissipates a lot of time and energy because people are jumping from one class to another, from one teacher to another. And it places too much emphasis on the teachers and subjects, rather than on the student's total growth and development. That was one of my objections, although I have to say she brought in some very exciting people, particularly in the thirties.

Alexander Archipenko, the very famous sculptor, taught there a couple of summers. A few years back they

had a one-man show of his soon after he died. When she brought [David Alfaro] Siqueiros, the Mexican in here, there was an uproar about him even being in the country. You know, people called him a communist and said, "throw him out" and so on. It never fazed her in the least. She was apolitical and not at all concerned about his politics. The fact that he was an experimenter with new materials and had new ways of working and things of that kind interested her. He painted a mural on the back wall of the kind of inner patio at the school, and it was a typical Mexican scene. It looked like a labor organizer or political organizer haranguing the Mexican peasants, but it wasn't particularly a political thing. But in the meantime, there was this uproar trying to get him thrown out of the country. And it never seemed to bother her in the least. The mural is reproduced in a book on Siqueiros in Mexico, and it's in Spanish. And in the book it says that it was painted for political reasons. That wasn't true. They put a roof over the patio and just cut the lower part of the composition, so that section made no sense. And it was painted out because it was now inside of a room. But the outside stayed there, and there was still a lot of it [that] could still be faintly seen from the parking lot when I went back to teach there in 1958--it was still on the outside wall. What happened

was he was painting a fresco on wet plaster, using a spray gun to put the color on. And if you know anything about fresco painting, the way the color mixes with the plaster is by brushing it on; it's the way that makes the color mix with the plaster. Consequently, within a year or two after he painted it, almost all the color had washed off. There were still faint images there, but the color didn't stay--it didn't last. But maybe someday somebody will get in there and restore it. About 1960 they painted an awful kitchen green color over it, so I don't know whether anything left underneath could ever be salvaged or not. But in any case, it stayed there; it wasn't painted out because of political reasons. It just faded out; it just disappeared, as things will that are outdoors.

She brought in Rico Lebrun to teach there in, I think, 1938. And that's when I became acquainted with him. And, as you probably know, he was a teacher in the Jepson Art Institute.

ROGERS: Did you meet Hans Hofmann when he was at the Chouinard school?

JEPSON: Oh, yes.

ROGERS: How do you remember him?

JEPSON: Well, at that point, you see, he just came in from Europe, and his English was terrible. Actually, he

couldn't speak English very well--didn't communicate very much that way. But he did communicate by gesture, by shrugging his shoulders, and by demonstration. Even by the way he would set up a still life and so on, he managed to communicate a great deal, I thought. And that impressed me very much because, I think, as an outgrowth to that, I began to wonder about gesture and communication, or what relation is there to the kind of gestures a man makes, just in ordinary conversation, to the kind of painting he does, the images he creates? So I started to get curious about that. And then, also, there was a man who had a very strong influence on my life by the name of Laurence Murphy, who had been one of my first drawing teachers at Chouinard. He started to teach in 1926 at Chouinard at the same time I started [as a student]. At that point he was in his late fifties, I guess, but he had a very inquiring mind, and he was constantly working--a tremendous producer. He never showed his paintings and drawings until I talked him into showing them in my school gallery and sent them on to the de Young Museum in San Francisco. He was a bachelor and very much a loner, a very private person. But he was very excited about Hofmann being at Chouinard, and he said that this influenced a new direction for him. He felt that he was no longer going to do the things he had been doing, that because of this he was

going to go off in a new direction. It was a kind of a special class, and it seemed to me that most of the people there that were in Hofmann's class were schoolteachers at universities and high schools, as I recall. The class seemed to be programmed as a separate course, and I think she was probably paying him a percentage of the income of the class or something; it wasn't part of the regular school schedule as such. I don't know whether he came in in the middle of the year or what it was. I really can't recall all that much about it.

But I think Mrs. Chouinard did a fantastic job in bringing all these different people in, although I didn't always think so much of it at the time. I remember when Archipenko was there, and he was there primarily during the summers. He seemed to be an awful prima donna to me because he insisted that the students only study with him at the time that he was teaching there. And the classes would go five days a week for six weeks. They worked on sculpture in the mornings and drawing in the afternoon. But as I thought about it later, I decided that that was the only way to go, that that was the only way that an art program should be carried on. So, consequently, when I went back on my last tour of duty at Chouinard, I got them to work on a concentrated program where the students would have to take the same class four or five

days a week for an extended period, instead of taking four different subjects with different teachers, as would be customary in an art school. The school adopted that program as a regular routine for the whole school. The result was [that] over a period of a year--thirty-two weeks--they could take the four subjects, but they didn't do them simultaneously; they did them in sequence of eight weeks each. It made a tremendous difference in a lot of things. It simplified the bookkeeping and reduced teaching hours, and that's the main reason the school adopted it. It seemed to me one of the primary purposes of art education was to get people involved and committed with as little distraction as possible, and when people were jumping from one class to another, from one teacher's ideas to another teacher's ideas, and so on, this was a disrupting distraction. So they adopted the concentrated program, and when Chouinard was closed down and the California Institute of the Arts moved to the new campus out at Valencia, that's the only part of the program they saved. They kicked out all the teachers. [laughter] They kept a couple of them as a kind of a token gesture for a year or so. I think that [Stephan] Von Heune, who was a teacher at Chouinard, is still out there. But other than that, I don't think there are There may be others who have gone back since. I heard

recently one of the old Chouinard teachers, Bill Moore, was teaching a design class there.

ROGERS: You did not get the advantage of those extended classes, then. When you were an undergraduate at Chouinard, you had to go to all the four classes simultaneously, and you were constantly being moved around from teacher to teacher.

JEPSON: Well, I didn't, actually, because my interest was pretty concentrated to drawing and painting. There were no requirements. If you wanted to go to school that way, that's the way it went. At least after the first year, I had a pretty concentrated program myself.

ROGERS: How would you evaluate your art education there?

JEPSON: Well, I think it was pretty traditional, although at the time it seemed like an innovative kind of program and we were aware of questions about the modern movement because of the very fact that we didn't have to draw casts--a big innovation at that period of time. A lot of schools in the United States and in Europe--and I understand that some of them are still doing it--required that you draw from plaster casts for the first year at least, and some schools required it for two years. And once I had a teacher work in my night school, Nikolai Fechin. He told me that they made him draw for nearly twelve years in Russia before they let him paint. Of

course, he started as a very young child. But the drawing always started with plaster casts, with the reproductions generally of the antique or things of that kind, and they just sat down there and doodled away for a week or two until they made a copy of the thing in terms of prevailing value systems. We had a three-hour session, and we'd generally work for a couple of hours on the drawing of a live model. And the third hour we'd draw a detail. This was required, and this seemed like an innovative program. Actually it wasn't; it was just a kind of, oh, a taking-off of an old academic drill.

But, I look upon what I did for the next fifteen, twenty years as a kind of monotonous repetition of the same kind of thing. I think my whole approach as a teacher was [that of] benevolent tyrant--you know, teaching people "how to do it," criticizing everything while teaching them drawing as a kind of tasteful skill, I suppose. And I don't think that's what education in the arts should be about. But it took me a long time to really understand because, you see, the whole society and most all schools are patterned by preconceived cultural assumptions and expectations about learning as a logical rational system and creativity as a gift. They have focuses on subject matter: you learn about things, and you learn how to do it, you learn skills and techniques. The illusion

that these prevailing educational systems and practices cover the essential features of life and art stems from the belief that the intellect is something that can be programmed to become a detached problem-solving instrument. Modern education isn't strictly that; however, it's primarily what it amounts to. I have a lot of misgivings about educational generally.

ROGERS: In the summer you were teaching while you were still a student, how did it feel to be on the other side of the podium?

JEPSON: Well, this of course was a kind of a shock, an unexpected thing for me, because I never had any idea of ever being a teacher. It was just sort of thrown at me. I started out thinking that all I was going to be was a monitor to call roll in the morning, but it ended up I was helping the students because I was very skilled. So I would show them how to do it. [recorder turned off]

Because I had done very well, she hired me to teach drawing, and the next school year I had the whole class. Wow, she packed them in there! We had these big double studios and there must have been sixty people enrolled in that class. Fortunately, they didn't all come at once. So she gave me a teaching assistant to help out, and he was, as I look back, terribly incompetent. I just couldn't cope with that situation. I don't think anybody could

with that many students--and just a green kid. So I didn't do so very well.

In midyear, they moved from Eighth Street into the new building they had just built to her specifications. Drawing benches were just packed in one right after another. And in order to help that many students, I used to try to pace myself. I'd give three minutes to each person, see (gee! that was terrible!), and because I was so green, I couldn't talk to the class as a group. [laughter] It took me a half-hour to get up nerve enough to make an announcement, let alone lecture or talk to the class. [laughter] So I had to help them individually.

I wasn't rehired for the 1930 fall class. So I left that, got married, and started designing and making furnishings for outdoor miniature golf courses. You know, I did all kinds of things--made furniture, footbridges, windmills, etc. And that was the only thing I could get to do. You must realize, the Depression was hitting. Jobs were scarce, so I just had to take anything I could do. And then the next year, I had my son Neil to take care of.

Oh, and there's one other thing. While I was still in art school my next to the last year, I was working nights in a studio that was making circus show banners. There was an old-timer, an old codger, that had been

painting circus show banners way back into the 1890s, sometime. (See, this was around 1928, '29.) I was working nights in there painting show banners [with figures of] sword swallowers, fat ladies, and hula girls. [laughter] I was the figure man. There were other people that did other details: trees, landscapes, backgrounds, and so on. The job required that I had to draw the life-size figure in fifteen minutes and paint it complete in an hour. And, believe me, you learned a lot of tricks that way. And they had to look very realistic with highlights--I never put enough highlights on things to satisfy the boss (he called it "highlife").

Well, anyway, that was my first commercial art experience. I worked off and on in that studio for a period of a year or so. Later I had a furniture business in Beverly Hills right on Beverly Drive with a friend named Laurence Wilson. I was designing, and we were actually producing the furniture there. In those days it was more open with vacant lots on either side of us. We did this in the back in a three-car garage on an alley. Laurence Wilson and his wife, Mariam Haworth, both studied serigraphy at the Jepson Art School under Guy McCoy, who was a pioneer in making silk-screen printing into a fine art. They are now both teaching printmaking in London public art schools. Wilson's step-daughter, Jan

Haworth, is a prominent artist, born in Los Angeles, who has had shows in New York, London and many cities throughout Europe. The business didn't go very well and it was in the middle of the Depression; you had to compete with mass commercial furniture production. When we finally decided to close it up, we sold the remaining stock of furniture, and I went back to school, to the Chicago Art Institute. Although I was married, I left my wife and child here.

ROGERS: Before we go into that, I would like to go back to Chouinard for just a minute. You said there were so many students there. What was the art education picture in Los Angeles at that time? There was Otis Art Institute and Chouinard. How about the universities?

JEPSON: That was it: Otis and Chouinard. Most universities had little or no art program. Most of it, whatever it was, was primarily dominated by art historians. There were very few fine-art classes, but there were many art education classes, teaching people to teach art in grammar school or something. Up until the fifties, those college accrediting associations sent around people to investigate art schools, and would say to me, "Well, we have no studio art classes in our college" or "We don't teach art there." It's only very recent, maybe in the last twenty-five years, that art in colleges really

started to boom. I understand it's one of the major departments in most colleges and universities now. But for a while, there wasn't much going on. And consequently, Chouinard Art Institute and the Otis Art Institute were about the only art schools. Clinton Adams was a teacher at Chouinard in the early thirties, taught commercial art and advertising there. Then he quit Chouinard and started the Art Center school on Seventh Street. But there wasn't very much going on in colleges among artists, they never looked to colleges as being that important. However, USC and, I think, UCLA probably had some classes, too, but there wasn't as much going on as there was in the art schools. It would seem to me that in most cases, the art classes were adjuncts of some other department. Like in USC, I'm sure it was a part of the architecture department at that time, although later it became, I think, separate. I taught a night class at USC for one semester in 1957, when Francis de Erdely was on sabbatical, in the university college program.

ROGERS: The Los Angeles County Museum was out at Exposition Park at that time. Did you go and see any of the pieces that were out there? Did you have any museum exposure at all?

JEPSON: It would seem to me that there wasn't too much.

While I was a student in art school?

ROGERS: Now we're talking about 1926 to 1930.

JEPSON: Yeah, I don't think [I went to the museum], although I can remember the galleries around town.

Chouinard was near Carondelet Street on Eighth Street at that time, in an old building that is still there. I think it's a nursing school or something like that now. I remember going up Carondelet. [Dalzell] Hatfield Gallery on Seventh Street had an exhibition of Matisse's work. And I was very excited about it at the time, and I remember going back and asking Mr. Chamberlin about it. You know, I could tell that there was something else going that seemed very lively and kind of interesting to me. He said, "Oh, it's just color relations. That's all it is." So he kind of brushed it aside. There was another gallery run by Earl Stendahl over on Wilshire Boulevard that I used to go to quite a bit. And there was the Biltmore Salon downtown in the Biltmore Hotel.

ROGERS: Did you get to see Galka Scheyer's Blue Four exhibition when she came here in 1926?

JEPSON: I saw the collection, but it would seem to me it was later than that because I was thinking that I should buy some of that stuff. You know, it was fantastic. They were selling for thirty-five dollars to sixty-five dollars apiece. She was trying to pick up enough money

to try to survive on. But that was in the Stendahl Gallery on Wilshire Boulevard [where] I saw the Guernica, too. But it seems to me that was in the middle thirties sometime.

ROGERS: Well, I was just inquiring about the gallery scene and how much art you had been exposed to other than just the Chouinard education. How much outside stimulus were you getting in these years?

JEPSON: Do you remember or do you have any idea when the Los Angeles [Public] Library was built? Because I remember going down and seeing them painting murals on the walls there. I can't remember what period that was, but they were painting murals on the walls.

ROGERS: I have it here. The Dean Cornwall murals for the Los Angeles Public Library were four major scenes: discovery era, mission building era, founding of Los Angeles, 1781, and Americanization era; and that was done between 1927 and 1932.

JEPSON: Yes, well, Mrs. Chouinard got Dean Cornwall to come over and talk to us one time, and we managed to go down there and see him at work. But he wasn't the only one who was painting murals in there. There were other people who were decorating that place.

ROGERS: Well, he was the main force behind it, wasn't he?

JEPSON: Yeah, well, he did the main rotunda, but I think

there was a man named [Albert] Herter that did some [California] history things. Murals had interested me in high school. I remember one of the things I submitted for the scholarship, lunette mural over a door. So I thought I wanted to be a mural painter. Anyway, that was kind of an exciting time for me to go down and see a painter at work on one. I think Cornwall was taken by the idea that he was no longer an illustrator, that he was going to be a fine artist from then on, and he stylized those things in a kind of superficial way. I felt disappointed in them as fine art.

ROGERS: When does an illustrator become a fine artist?

JEPSON: Well, an illustrator is a popular artist who is primarily concerned with subject matter and story content and a kind of literal description of what is going on in the story rather than any kind of personal insight.

It really is quite a different thing than fine-art painting, although certainly the old masters were illustrators. They illustrated stories, biblical stories, and so on. But there is a hell of a difference between a Masaccio and somebody like that and Dean Cornwall, for instance. Although I had some idea that I might want to be an illustrator at that point, I know that it wasn't long after that that I decided I didn't want to be an illustrator. I had taken a couple of illustration jobs.

I worked very briefly in a commercial art studio and when you work for somebody else in a commercial studio they're dictating what you do, want this fixed and that fixed. I just decided that wasn't my thing. I had always wanted to be independent, so, for the most part, I didn't work for many people. Most of the commercial work that I have done in designing and other things that I've done (except for the period that I was a tool designer at Lockheed during World War II), I didn't work for anybody else. I worked free lance. I did designs for people on commission and so on, but I would keep my own independence, and I made sure that they paid me when I delivered. Which was one of the things I learned very early about artists--they get taken pretty easily if they don't watch it.

ROGERS: Did you do any public exhibitions while you were at Chouinard? Were you included in any?

JEPSON: No, actually I didn't go into just doing things of the fine-art nature, except for my drawings. I was always drawing, until I started my own school, and then I dropped all those commercial contacts I had. It wasn't till I started my own school that I started to do some sculpture for myself using the wood-carving tools that I had used previously to carve decorative ornament for a while. Rico Lebrun was doing some paintings, and he

said that he felt he missed working from a physical object. His figures and the kind of things he was doing were just out of his head. So I carved some three-dimensional models for him. Generally, [the] fine-art work I did wasn't [exhibited]. I showed during my last year in art school. I submitted a thing that was shown in the County Museum for the California Watercolor Society. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

In 1929 I submitted a couple of watercolors to a [California] Watercolor Society show at the County Museum in Exposition Park. And I got the second prize, and it was reproduced in the Los Angeles Times. Arthur Millier mentioned it in his column. But my form of survival in most of my adult life I got married as soon as I left art school and had three children and a wife to support. I had to scratch for a living to survive. So the fine-art scene didn't look like a very lucrative thing for me.

ROGERS: What kind of art was winning prizes in those years? What was the public accepting?

JEPSON: Well, you know in the thirties California was very much that American-scene kind of thing. I know the things that I sent in to the California Watercolor Society were landscapes painted out in the country. I think one of them had a barn and a horse and eucalyptus trees--

the usual kind of stuff that they were doing at that point. There was some abstract work being done but not a great deal. There was a period of isolationism from the rest of the world during the Depression, and some of them were politically oriented. That was pretty much it.

ROGERS: How much was California exposed to what those artists in New York were doing?

JEPSON: Oh, of course, things from New York and the Midwest were reproduced in the art magazines of the period; you could tell pretty well what was going on. The works of these people were being brought to this side of the country. We were all aware of Grant Wood and Thomas Hart Benton and those people; we were all very conscious of the fact that they were around.

ROGERS: Was there imitation of this type of thing or of the social realists among the local artists?

JEPSON: I think most of that influence came from Mexico. The real stars of the period that the art students--and probably the teachers, too--were excited about were the Mexicans, [José] Orozco and that kind of people. Maybe I'm just reading it into this, but for me they were the ones that impressed me most. I never was overly keen about Thomas Hart Benton and Grant Wood myself, and I know they were very popular at the

time; and, especially if you look at the WPA projects that were going on, you'd see a kind of mixed influence of American scene paintings [and] Mexican art.

You've probably heard about the WPA here. Lorser Feitelson and S. Macdonald-Wright were the heads of the mural painting program. And their girlfriends seemed to be the artists who got the designs to do, and the men were the flunkies. So they were the helpers who filled in color spaces and so on. I think that's the way most of it went. I guess there were some men that were painting murals here; I didn't know many of them. On that project there was a young fellow by the name of Hanson who did a sculpture of Lincoln on the Main Street side of the [Los Angeles] city hall there that I thought was a pretty good example of the better kind of sculpture that was being done.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE ONE

JUNE 3, 1976

ROGERS: Mr. Jepson, the last time we were together, we were discussing your years as a student and young teacher at Chouinard and some of the people that taught there. How about the students that were with you at that time? Is there anyone that you still know about or who has achieved fame?

JEPSON: Well, most of the more successful students went off to New York as commercial artists. Millard Sheets, of course, was a student there. Phil Dike was a student there. Both of them had started a year before I did, and Millard Sheets was the only one that I knew very well. So it was Mrs. Chouinard's habit to give the advanced students teaching roles, and Millard Sheets, being the star student of the painting department classes, was given a class in watercolor painting. So I took his class in watercolor painting. I also used to go with him on sketching trips. Millard wasn't the kind who liked to stay inside much. His interest was primarily outside. Landscape painting was what he was really into more than anything else, and the still-life classes, the figure-painting classes and the figure-drawing classes--life

classes--seemed to bore him, and so he would skip most of those classes. It became a source of embarrassment for him at times. I remember when we came back from one sketching trip, we almost ran into one of the teachers, and he dodged quickly behind a wall or something so that he wouldn't have to explain why he wasn't in class.

[laughter] But because of this enormous skill and facility with the materials of painting, during his last year at school he had been quite successful in selling his work. His first one-man show sold out. He must have had at least thirty-five paintings there, and they sold every one of them. That was the Hatfield Gallery, near the 2500 block, I think, on Seventh Street.

Millard, as I recall, was the kind of person who not only had this tremendous capacity to produce work, but he was extremely professional about it; and one of the things that struck me was that he never failed. He would go out with three or more watercolor papers that were stretched on boards beforehand, and he would always come back with that many completed paintings that he could mat and frame. He never failed, never missed. And this same kind of facility seemed to go into everything he did. His capacity for work was such that once he decided to do something, that was already settled. Once he had decided what he wanted to do, it seemed that his mind was

on the next project. So he always had this kind of drive.

After his first show he had sold some paintings, so he had some money, and he was, I guess, probably the only student in the school who could afford a so-called studio. They called them studio apartments because they had north windows in them, but actually they were dinky little rooms. In any case, I went over there, and he had three untouched bare stretched canvases leaning against the wall, and he pointed to them one by one and said, "I'm going to send this painting to this competition. I'm going to send that painting to another competition." I think he had three competitions lined up. And he had in mind what he was going to paint on each of these canvases. And he not only sent them to the shows, but he won first prize in all three! So he had that kind of mind through the years. It always seemed that when he was involved in one project, his mind was way ahead on the next project.

I recall that we were walking out towards Seventh Street from the Chouinard art school, and Millard said to me, "My ambition is to pay the highest income tax of any artist in California." And it's my belief that he probably made it at least for a while. His plans and his ideas about what he wanted to do seemed to be pretty well

set, and as far as I can see, his ideas about art and about education and about what he wants to do with it seemed to have changed so very little in all the years. At least that was the impression I got when I went back to teach at the Otis Art Institute, where he had become the new director in 1954. He got me to head the drawing department and the drawing classes there. My impression of his idea about art and the role of the artist as a kind of adjunct to industry and to the various commercial establishments and so on seemed to be oriented in that direction. Even all his planning of the kind of classes that should be taught and how they should be directed and what their goals should be were very little different from the kind of goals that he set for himself as a professional artist who is doing decorations for buildings of businesses, established industries and so on. In fact, it is my general opinion that his work represents the kind of establishment art that's very acceptable in that part of the community. His potential, when he was very young, seemed to be much broader than that, from my point of view. And it seems to me that the kind of freshness and youthful vitality disappeared over the years. The work he did for industries on commissions and so on remained pretty much the same throughout his life, at least from what I'm able to see on building and loan

company facades and so on. He was also very much involved with architecture and architectural rendering. Even as a student he was teaching a class of professional architects in rendering. I have heard from others that although he is not an architect himself--he works with an architect--he received many commissions for buildings just on the basis of the architectural renderings that he made. They were, by far, superior to anything anybody has done before or since, as far as I'm concerned. But that seemed to be the kind of role he set for himself, and the kind of role he's followed throughout his life is pretty much that kind of thing. And it's in that area that he seemed to have his greatest success. Among those people in industry and the social contacts related to it, he has the status of a fine artist, I suppose, but essentially it seems to me that he's otherwise. He is an applied artist, in a sense, applying his work to those needs of society. Many people have a lot of reservations about his achievement even in that area.

ROGERS: Do you believe that this desire for economic security will rob an artist of his originality and his drive and the vitality that you spoke about him having when he was young?

JEPSON: Well, his work, of course, being subservient to the needs of the community, the people that are paying

for it, naturally that influences the character and quality of the work. I think that Millard's ideas and the kind of work that he did and that he liked to do seemed to fit that need so well that there never seemed to be any conflict between this requirement and his own likes, his own interests. So it's an entirely different role for the artist to take. It's so different. It isn't directed towards change and growth in the sense that many artists strive for. I think the questions and the doubts and the need to start over never bothered him at all because he was already just so far ahead of what he was doing at the time. In this sense, it was already prescribed by him and by the needs of the job, so it becomes quite a different thing. This is reflected also in his attitude towards education. As I said, it didn't seem to change from the time he was a student until the last contact that I had with him when I was at Otis. I left Otis in '58, partly over a kind of disagreement with that same kind of a stereotyped position, that the school's primary purpose was to train people for the needs of industry. His view of art education as acquisition of skills, training, and language that you learn first as a kind of prerequisite of basic study isn't a role that I felt education should take. Although I think he was a little confused by what was going on in my classes,

he wasn't at all dissatisfied with it, and he never bothered me about it.

But as a director, he was putting a good deal of pressure on Peter Voulkos. I don't know whether you've heard of Voulkos or not. Pete Voulkos appeared to me to be the most dynamic and most creative person in the school. And I felt that if I had been the director--I had applied for that job, by the way, with Kenneth Ross and Millard Sheets--I would have made Pete Voulkos the center of the whole school. I would have tried to build the school around him because I felt that he had that kind of creative drive and vitality that has made him a national leader in his field. On the other hand, Millard seemed to be engaged in suppressing his [Voulkos's] influence by not allowing students to study in his class until their third year, and then they couldn't take it unless they were using it as a major. He finally managed to get Pete to quit. I left the school because the pay was so terrible. The pay was so bad, and I'd been there four and a half years and hadn't received any kind of increase. Millard was marvelous at getting the county to build buildings and projects of that kind but wasn't very successful at getting pay raises for the employees. I had dropped all my commercial contacts when I started my own school. I decided I didn't want to go back into commercial work

anymore, so I was in need of more income. I went to Chouinard and applied to teach in the summer session. And they said, "Well, we don't really need another summer teacher. We'd like it if you'd come stay here through the year for us." Then they offered me more money, so I decided to quit.

ROGERS: We're getting just a little bit ahead. We were talking about Millard. The other thing that I would like to ask you in regards to Chouinard was, when you were a student, was there a hangout? Was there a social life? Was there an artist crowd that went around together and did things, aside from going to class?

JEPSON: No, not really. I think that that kind of thing seems to have developed in Los Angeles more in recent years than it did in those days. We, of course, had artist friends that we would go with, maybe one or two--maybe a girl or something of that kind. But as I recall, you know, it was kind of a skimpy period.

I was thinking of one time--I don't know whether I mentioned it previously or not, but Millard wanted to go out landscape painting, and he said, "Well, I'm ready to go, but I don't have any gas. Can we get together some money?" So we got about thirty-six cents between us that we pooled, and I think we got about three gallons of gas, and we went sketching over towards Monrovia

or someplace. Certain times of year gypsies used to come and camp there, and they'd hang their clothes-lines out; and all this made it a desirable location for us. Sometimes we would go up in an area where Dodger Stadium is now; there used to be a kind of shantytown up in there. People had goats and chickens and things around in those buildings up there, and there was kind of a little gully there and a little canyon called Chavez Ravine. When they built the stadium there they flattened those hills, filled the canyons and made an entirely different place out of it.

But I don't think there was much in the way of social life, outside of the school. In the city, it wasn't till the La Cienega thing developed, where the galleries all collected there, where artists would go. We used to go up to a place there, Barney's Beanery, after an exhibition, an opening or something; a lot of artists gathered together there. But earlier, it seemed that the artists at that time shied away from that kind of thing. They all had their own personal friends; but the idea of a kind of group--I don't think there was too much of that.

ROGERS: After you were through with your final year at Chouinard, you mentioned that you had gone into designing miniature golf courses and building the golf course

furniture, so to speak, for it, and then you went into your own furniture-making business. This required quite a bit of knowledge of the working with tools.

JEPSON: Well, I started very young working with tools. When I was very young, I was always building something, making something. I think the earliest things were probably skateboards or things of that kind. I made coasters that were patterned after racing cars, and we'd take them up on hills and ride them down. I'd always be working with things of that kind, and I was also interested in mechanical things. I remember that I saved a lot of money--I thought it was a lot; it was only a few dollars--but it took me a long time to save enough money to get an electric motor, which I used to drive some of these mechanical things that I would make with toys and mechanical stuff that I would find. Every time I'd find a friend that had some kind of a gadget that I wanted, I'd trade him something for it.

ROGERS: After you decided to close your furniture business, what was your decision to do then?

JEPSON: I decided to go back to Chicago, to the art school of the Chicago Art Institute--just for the summer. We closed the business. I got enough money out of the sale of merchandise that we had left over. I left my wife and child here. I had always been interested in

a man by the name of Watkins who taught a class called "Design in Nature," I think it was called. And I went back there primarily to join his class, but it was a disappointment to me at that point. I had heard about him and seen some of the things that he had done, but the class was very disappointing. But the experience of being in Chicago See, the school is in the museum there, and they had a tremendous collection of masterworks from all periods there. Those things particularly excited me. The Watkins class was in the Field Museum [of Natural History], which had all the primitive arts.

I view my experiences there in Chicago as being primarily important to me because it opened my eyes to a lot of things that I hadn't been too well acquainted with here. For example, this was the last year of the [Century of Progress] exposition, and all the artists in the community got together, and they were showing their work in the park between the Chicago Art Institute and the place where they had the exposition. It wasn't like the kind of sidewalk shows you ordinarily see, where all the commercial hacks are putting their work. This was the work of top people, some of whom were really quite well known even at that time. That allowed me to see a lot of experimental work and things of that kind.

Many of the things that were shown I think probably were products of the Bauhaus school that was there in Chicago. Unfortunately for me, I didn't go to that school instead of the Chicago Art Institute, which I found to be sort of backwards, even in terms of Chouinard. I don't look at [Chouinard] now as being particularly advanced, but they were doing some things that were not exactly traditional. On the way back from Chicago, I stopped at some of the art departments in colleges and art schools that I could find in the Midwest, and they were really dismal places. I can't describe how bad they were. I remember one room that was a drawing class--I guess, a life class. They had a model posing against a backdrop that was all squared off and numbered, so the students were squaring off their paper and drawing by the numbers or something--nowadays that would probably be a sensation.

While I was back there I had written to Mrs. Chouinard to help to remind her that I was still around, and the following year I got a telegram asking me to go teach in the fall of 1934. But between the period when I was a student at Chouinard and the time I went back there to teach, I became interested in reading about the role of art in education. I suppose that even my earlier experience at Chouinard helped to stimulate this

because certainly there were a lot of questions and doubts about education and the arts within the school. The fact that Mr. Chamberlin, who I liked very much and who influenced me considerably, was questioning the direction of the educational policy at Chouinard enough so that he quit right in the middle of one session--which gave me a chance to teach my own class But it is this questioning and doubt that seemed to be instilled in me. Whether it started someplace else or not, I don't know. In any case, this seemed to drive me more through all the years, the questions and doubts about what I was doing in my own work and what I was teaching students and the way I was teaching them and so on continued to interest me and probably accounted for my starting my own school after World War II.

I don't know whether I talked about my three and a half years at Lockheed. When the war started, of course, everybody was thinking about doing something for the war effort; and being married, I wasn't eligible for the draft at that point. I was teaching at Chouinard, and so, as soon as the semester was over in February--the war, of course, started in December--I quit and went to work at Lockheed. Friends who were working at Lockheed told me to hire into the toolmaking department because this was the center of the factory. The building of the

jigs and fixtures for the manufacture of the planes, this was where they said I would learn the most, and this was also the highest-paid [job]. So I hired in as a tool-maker. And I lasted in that position very briefly. They soon made me what they called a tool liaison man, working between the toolmaking department and the manufacturing plant, seeing what the troubles were about the tools that they were using, and bringing the message back to the shop, telling them what they didn't like about certain tools or what they thought should be corrected, or changed, or something of that kind. So I learned the business very fast. There wasn't any questions about your background or your training, so within a brief period I was actually designing tools for the shop. They would get orders for the repair or the replacement of jigs and fixtures, and actually most of those things that came back were tools that never had been adequate because they were made as rough [tools] just for the prototype airplanes. And then, as they would produce more of them, they'd keep using some of these preliminary tools. So what was required [was] that they needed to be completely redesigned. And all they had was the repair work order in the shop without a detailed drawing. They would give me the work order and I would then make a design plan which could be easily translated by the

toolmakers. And later on, I felt that that was the most creative job that I had the whole time that I was there, although they soon transferred me into the tool engineering department. I was the senior tool designer there for the rest of the period. But during my brief period in the toolmaking department, I had a chance to experience and to understand the use of these tools and to plan changes that would improve their efficiency.

Not only that, but they had something going on in the plant whereby if you made some suggestions for improvement and they adopted them, they would pay you 10 percent of the savings in the plant for the first year. It never amounted to that, actually, but it did amount to some money. Before I was transferred into the tool engineering department, I got three bonuses for changing the manufacturing procedures--some minor things. One of the things I designed I think could be very easily understood. They had separate tools for the fabrication of each part in the airplane. When parts come off the hydropress, the flanges were irregular and needed a rough trimming. This required a form block and a guide on each one of them which would allow them to trim each part separately. The tool just for each part alone filled one whole big area where they kept these things. I made the suggestion that they design a universal tool

to put on the band saw which could be adjusted to fit any size flange they wanted. As might be expected, it was rejected when I first proposed it, but I waited until I got an order to replace one of these tools that had been damaged and broken or something. As I recall, I put that tool number on this design, knowing full well that once they got it on the band saw, they would never use one of these other form block guides again. Then I proposed it to the management again, so when they investigated they found that the shop was using this in place of all the other trimming tools. So the bonuses I received for these ideas was one of the things--together with the fact that they made us buy war bonds--that helped me start my own school. I had enough savings on a Friday after the Japanese quit, I went to them [Lockheed] and said, "I'm leaving." I think I began to get stomach ulcers from that job because there was a lot of stress connected with it--long hours, a lot of pressure. We never got an order to design a tool that wasn't overdue and that wasn't, according to them, holding up the manufacturer of the plane needed to win the war.

ROGERS: You started to teach at Chouinard in 1934, and there were seven years in there where you had a chance to try out some of your educational teaching theories.

JEPSON: Actually there wasn't. There was a lot of

questions I was asking myself, but few answers; so I think that most of what I was still doing was the traditional fragmented thing which disrupts creative growth because it conditions the mind to habitually separate thought from feeling and action. There was the idea that there were skills to be acquired, that you learned how to do it, then you might be able to apply that to ideas that were your own. So I was probably as confident in reducing art to a formal system as anybody around and very glib about it--the questions and doubts that I had were there while I was at Chouinard and when I started my own school pretty much within the framework of a traditional idea about art education. I tried to gather people together who already had a following. Because I was a drawing teacher, I was more interested in the drawing; I taught painting and composition and other subjects, but my primary interest was in drawing. I got all the best drawing teachers--or at least the ones that were best known. So what we had, really, was a kind of drawing school.

ROGERS: How do you go about starting an art school?

JEPSON: That's very simple. You need a building to work in and some teachers that want to teach some classes and put an advertisement in the paper, and that's the way it goes. [laughter] It works from there, pretty much.

If you call it a "school," and the various departments in the city find it out, why, then you're under all kinds of regulations about how many people you can have, and you should have a certificate of occupancy and so many fire extinguishers and so on. There are many things that are not required if you have some kind of an association or a league of students or something of that kind, but if it's called a "school" or an "institute," let's say, which is listed as a school, why then you're under all kinds of restrictions. You can escape it for quite a while without being bothered by it too much, but in the long run it can cause some difficulty. They're not about to shut you down; they just come in and tell you that you have to do this and do that or put in more fire extinguishers and things of that kind. My school started with one room, actually. I had a room in a building that was directly across from the Otis Art Institute--I think it's on Carondelet Street. I had a room downstairs, and the Otis school still uses that building for graduate studios in that building there on the Wilshire Boulevard corner.

TAPE NUMBER: II, SIDE TWO

JUNE 3, 1976 and JUNE 10, 1976

ROGERS: You were talking about your one-room school and describing the facilities.

JEPSON: Well, I hired three different people to teach there. One of them was F. Tolles Chamberlin. I got him out of retirement because he had conducted some successful classes in his own studio since he gave up teaching at Chouinard and USC. I got him because he had a following of people and was well known in the city. And then I had night classes going and I got Nikolai Fechin to teach at night--there again because he was a master draftsman, actually. I don't know whether you know his work or not, but that was his drawing as well as his portrait painting, that was attractive to a lot of people, and he had his own following, so I got him to come in. So those classes were filled right away. I had a young woman by the name of Milly Rocque, who I had known first as a student of mine at Chouinard in '34 or '34, I think; and she had become a professional illustrator for national magazines and as a set illustrator had done work in the [movie] studios. And she taught the illustration class. So that was the start of the Jepson Art Institute, and after I had been there a couple of months I had a big

waiting list, and the [California] State Board of Education was asking me to take in some rehabilitation cases that had heard about us. Because of returning veterans on the GI bill, every place had a waiting list, and there was a great need for it. So it was no problem getting students. So I moved out of there, moved down on Seventh Street in a building--I can't tell you the exact address; it was directly across from Ted Gibson's art supply store. I think there's a garment factory or something in there now. But I was in that building for five years and then for two years over at Ardmere, just off of Wilshire.

ROGERS: Could you elaborate a little bit more on the rehabilitation aspects? Were these GIs who came there?

JEPSON: No, not necessarily. The state Board of Education had handicapped people, mostly--people who had been hospitalized for long lengths of time. They were on some kind of relief; at least the state was paying for the tuition, as I recall. This lead-in helped me because in order to get accreditation for the GI Bill, I had to have approval by the state Board of Education. So I got approval for GIs, and once I had that, of course, I had all these GIs from World War II to draw upon. I think for the five years that I was on Seventh Street we had an average of about 250 full- and part-time students

at a time.

There were probably about twelve or fifteen teachers. None of them were full time. The only people that were full-time employees were the office help--the secretaries, the bookkeeper, my registrar, and so on. One of the persons that helped me a great deal was a girl by the name of Frances Berkey. [She] wanted to study with me but didn't seem to have very much money, so I gave her the job of keeping the records, keeping track of students and so on. She had a master's degree in educational administration from a Missouri college. She became my registrar and really helped me tremendously because she set up the technical aspects of keeping records. The Cardex systems that we set up, and the whole program from the very start, was done properly--so much so that it was used as a model for the other private schools in the state. But it was due entirely to Frances Berkey's energies and efforts.

ROGERS: How did you like being an administrator?

JEPSON: Oh, I don't know; it's not so easy. I could do it; I did it. Things went all right. As an administrator you have to worry about a lot of trivial things, and I found that I was spending more and more time behind the desk. I think that was probably one of the reasons that I decided to fold up the whole thing and quit,

although I could do it and always managed to meet the payroll and things of that kind. But it wasn't what I wanted to do in education. I got so much involved in school business that I couldn't even teach classes. Ordinarily, throughout the period, I would teach at least one class a week; I was very fortunate in getting people to help me in the office who made it much easier than it might have been otherwise. Berkey, in particular, I think really saved my life. One of the reasons I hadn't started any classes of my own or done anything about starting an art school previously was that I was even upset about the idea of having to hire models and things of that kind. This wasn't my bag, that's all. Anyway, I did it, and the thing just kept growing, and in a very brief period we developed quite a reputation and seemed to have considerable effect on the community. [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

This effect, I think, was in some ways a little bit superficial. I would think it had more a quality of myth about the good old days. It was more like the kind of star worship that goes on in Hollywood more than anything else. And I think it's an assumption that most people have that if they're studying with somebody, that therefore they are disciples or they are workers in the manner of the person that they're studying with. This

is something that Rico Lebrun, for example, was very much against. And yet, there were not only followers among students but some of the teachers in the school who seemed to want to look upon his role there as that kind of leader. I think that they were misinterpreting or missing the real significance of his role as a teacher, as a consequence.

I don't know whether I told you this on the tape or not, but in the school, it was a very open kind of situation, and when Rico Lebrun or other teachers were talking, the whole school would listen in. And it was pretty much that way for all the classes. There was a kind of free, open thing. The classes were close enough together so that this was possible. In fact, we were too close; we didn't have that much space.

Unquestionably, Lebrun was the best speaker in the place. He could talk anytime from any point of view from any position he might wish to start from. There were others there that were also very good at this kind of thing, could talk to groups--Howard Warshaw and Bill Brice in particular. When I first started the school, these were three of the people that I hired very early. I think it was 1937 or '38 when Lebrun moved to Santa Barbara, California. Mrs. Chouinard got him to teach at Chouinard. So that's the time when I became acquainted

with him. I didn't have much contact with him in the intervening years, but I remembered him, of course, and had seen his first Los Angeles exhibition of drawings in Los Angeles at the Chouinard gallery, and knew what a dynamic teacher he was. So I went up to Santa Barbara and talked him into coming down. At that point in his life he had been going through a very difficult emotional period. He had just lost his wife, and he didn't know what he wanted to do, whether he would come or not. But I talked him into coming down. At first, he'd only come down every two weeks, I think it was, for a lecture. It wasn't till the following semester that he came down to teach two or three days a week. And in one period he was also teaching a night class.

When I moved the school to Seventh Street I had three rooms in the front that wasn't much use for anything other than a gallery because it was a walk-through to get into the back studios. I was trying to think of somebody that I might get to run this gallery. I had known Bill Brice when he was seventeen or eighteen years old. When he first graduated from high school, he went to Chouinard, and he was, as I remember him, the most sophisticated and most cosmopolitan of any of the students that I'd ever had. He knew about art galleries and gallery dealers in New York and in Paris and in places

where he had lived with his mother--who, as everyone knows, was an entertainer [Fanny Brice]. So he had this kind of background, and he had even started a collection. I think he had, very shortly before he enrolled at Chouinard, bought a Picasso drawing, which is an indication of the kind of young man he was. So he had been a student there for one year at that time, and then he went back and went to the Art Students League in New York. Then he came back to Chouinard for another year. So I remembered him as being a very bright young fellow, and I thought I'd try to get him to run my gallery for me. So I looked him up and he said, "Well, I'm not interested in running a gallery, but I'd like to teach drawing and painting." I told him, "Fine, I'd like that." I was looking for teachers, so I gave him his first job. He and Howard Warshaw had tried to run a night class--I don't know how successful it was--of some kind before that, but I think basically that was his first teaching experience, in a school anyway. And he said, "I have a friend who'd like to teach here also, Howard Warshaw." So after seeing some of his work, I hired him on Bill Brice's say-so. I had enough faith in him, belief in him, from just knowing him as a student. I had hired other teachers there during the years to teach painting. We had Henry Lee McFee teaching Saturday painting classes for a while, who I

had also become acquainted with at Chouinard. He was one of the teachers that Mrs. Chouinard brought in before Sheets got him to teach at Claremont college [Scripps]. There are others. I was thinking of one recently. I notice that Stanton Macdonald-Wright was one of the teachers that taught at Chouinard. He and Morgan Russell started something called synchronism. Morgan Russell taught there also. I was more impressed by him as a painter than I was with Macdonald-Wright's work. I probably should, for the record, put down some of those people, their names and so on, but at this point my brain isn't working too well.

ROGERS: Here perhaps I can help you a little bit. These are some names that you had mentioned before. Francis de Erdely.

JEPSON: Oh, yes. Francis de Erdely was another drawing teacher that had a considerable following, and I had him teach night classes throughout the whole period. I think he taught for me for at least seven years. The night classes never were truly integrated with the rest of the school and had very little connection with the rest of the program. And, of course, as an administrator, my interest in the night classes was in the fact that they would keep students coming, and he always had a big following. He never had less than thirty-five students

at night, I think. So his classes always made money for me and for him, because I paid all my teachers 50 percent of the income of the classes based on attendance. I did that because the Veterans Administration only paid actual attendance in each class, and I found that a lot of people would keep on going to classes and they weren't registered. Or a lot of times they would claim they were going to come to class, and they would drop out or something, and we would have to refund their money. So I had to base teachers' salaries on attendance of registered students. And it worked out very well for everyone. When I look back on it, the salaries were better than what I was getting when I went to Otis. Consequently, that part of it worked out pretty well for me. I always had a good CPA who kept me straight on my expenses and so on and gave me a percentage analysis so I knew how much I was spending for everything--knew pretty well where I was all the time. It's very important, I think, in any kind of business to have a good bookkeeper and a good accountant--something Mrs. Chouinard missed out on. Two different occasions she was robbed--they never did know how much money was embezzled--by people who were her bookkeepers and administrators.

JUNE 10, 1976

ROGERS: When we last talked together, Mr. Jepson, we were discussing the teachers at your school. How did you choose your teachers?

JEPSON: Well, I tried to choose teachers who were totally involved and committed as artists and divergent thinkers interested in an experimental approach to art education. Sometimes, it was just by chance or instinct that I brought people in. As I mentioned, I asked Bill Brice to come in because I found him to be a very intelligent student, and I'd always felt that a person who was a good student might also be a good teacher, and I especially thought so in his case because he was so articulate.

My whole attitude toward art was one of question and doubt about the nature of traditional art education--its use and its purpose and its value. And I had always felt that something was missing where one's focused attention was fixed on skills and on the end products. So questions and doubts started very early with me about this thing.

It would seem to me that even small children who are confused by what's being offered to them in schools--either confused by it or bored by it--in some way instinctively understand when their learning is stimulating and meaningful. They are quite aware of its effect

upon them, in the sense that if they are energized by it, they're very aware that they're fulfilled by this experience, whether they are able to verbally express it or not. Being told that to do something is good for them doesn't necessarily make them believe it or like it. This is, of course, the kind of thing that they're given. But essentially they're doing it not because it's good for them but because they'll be punished if they don't do it, either by rejection, lack of affirmation, or by poor grades or something of that kind. But it would seem to me one of the questions I was always asking myself after I started to teach was whether or not what we were doing was fundamental or basic. I have to say that I never met a teacher who didn't feel that what he was teaching was basic. All teachers seem to think that they are teaching fundamentals, and what they are teaching is basic and should be learned because it is assumed that it was of value to them to learn it that way.

So I have begun to ask questions about this kind of thing, and among the books that I've read, I would think that there are several which seem to pose a lot of questions that weren't being considered in the field of education generally. One of the earliest ones that came out in the thirties was a book by John Dewey called Art as Experience. It's been over thirty years since I've

read the book, so I can't review it here, but it seemed to me that the idea was, the emphasis should be on the experience--the idea that awareness, consciousness of the experience, was the essential ingredient in education. There was another book that came out sometime later, but not a lot later, called Education through Art, by Herbert Read, which seemed to some extent to follow the same theme. Neither John Dewey nor Herbert Read were artists [or] essentially creative people, although some people might think of them as being so; they're philosophers and intellectuals, essentially. So the shortcomings of both those books seemed to come out of their seeming need to explain art and to analyze it and to describe what was going on, and I always have some objection to that when I find laymen discussing creative activity. I felt that sort of naive. My interest at that time was on trying to find the organic roots of creative activity. I felt that if it was going to be basic, it ought to be like nature. In Art as Experience and in Education through Art, there is a reference to natural processes and the relationship as to how we perceive things in terms of organic processes within ourselves. And there was another book [by Louis Danz] that came out about the same time that interested me very much. A lot of it was devoted to analysis of terms and descriptions and of the way [he] would use

the terms. It was called The Psychologist Looks at Art. [He] had been a psychologist and an anthropologist, and I noticed that [in] the article written by S. Macdonald-Wright in the magazine [LAICA Journal] I showed you, he had mentioned Danz. This book is a kind of general summary of a lot of things that were going on during this period. I think that he referred back to John Dewey's Art as Experience, and he also quotes Alfred Korzybski from Science and Sanity, which was a kind of bible of the [Jepson Art Institute]. One of my students said, "You know, that's my bible; I keep it by my bedside at night-time." That was of interest to me particularly because of the emphasis on the relationship between language and the use of language and verbalization to the actual life processes which have to do with the organism as a whole--the life processes as an ongoing, changing event--and how the words we use are arbitrary fragmentations or separations. This was, I would say, of considerable interest to me because it seemed to verbalize something that I had in mind all of the time. Anyone who is involved in any kind of creative activity recognizes that when you're really with it--I read an article recently; the man called it a flow--when there's a kind of flow of energy, that somehow you recognize this alert attention and awareness that goes into it as a fulfilling energy-generating process.

I've done quite a bit of exploration into [this], and I'm now in the process of writing a book about the innate drive for stimulation of nerve-energy needs for developmental growth of brain cells that comes from attention and awareness in the arts. The unequivocal scientific evidence is quite clear that this is a very vital and important part of mental growth and mental health. And this is where I feel that a synthesis of this data with educational practices in the arts can begin to have more importance in the educational scheme, the idea of a kind of inner awareness, of mind-body processes as the essential feature of all art activity.

As an educator and as a man, Lebrun was the kind of man who asked questions and had doubts, particularly about the things that were given as fundamentals in art education. So he was constantly speculating on the possibility that not only the opposite might be true, but many other things were also true. It was this side of him that appealed to me most. Other than that, we always agreed as friends that we didn't impress each other that much. [laughter] And it has always seemed to me that a lot of people were overly impressed by his work, that they exaggerated its importance in some way. He seemed to draw a lot of followers, as well as people who disliked what he did intensely. He was a very dynamic

and very likable man. I loved him, and anyone that really knew him, I think, felt that way about him.

My association with him [was] both as a teacher in my school and [as] a very close friend who I spent a lot of time with out-of-doors. We both liked to go duck hunting in those days; and there aren't many ducks around, so we spent a lot of time in the rowboat out on the lake just sitting there and talking away all day long, day after day, many times. We have a part-interest in some cabins up at the Big Bear Lake, so my wife, Marcia, and I used to spend the summers up there with our two children; and he and his wife, Constance, and his stepson, David, would come up there and visit with us quite a bit. In any case, his importance for me in terms of his role in the community was in the direction he took as an educator, and it would seem to me that in that role, there's been a lot of misconceptions about what he did because there have been followers who copied the style of his work. [This] disturbed him intensely because, as he put it, referring to one artist that I won't name because I don't think it would serve any purpose at this point, "You know, every time he comes into my studio, two weeks afterwards something like what I'm doing appears on La Cienega Boulevard." And he said, "What bothers me about it is that he is mimicking

my mannerisms, which I hate. "It's like an impersonation of my mannerisms and my affectations, and he dramatizes the very things I try to escape from in my own work." I remember he said, "I'm not going to let that son of a bitch in my studio again." [laughter] But I think that mostly we talked about changing, and how difficult it was to change, and how we had been conditioned by our own efforts, by our own tendency as artists to practice--and, as he put it, to practice our mistakes. But all of this discussion seemed to fit into a general conclusion that I had about education: that somehow education was a kind of restrictive conditioning, and conditioning is habit-forming. Somehow, the common idea of education is that you develop good habits. And habits are restrictive, according to the way I feel. This all goes back to my interest in the idea of developmental energies. When you're stimulated, excited and involved, the more you do in this state the more you can do. And the fact that we are actually developing nerve energy needed for growth and maintenance of brain cells is pretty clearly proven now by lots of scientific experiments that have been going on in the last twenty years.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE ONE

JUNE 10, 1976

ROGERS: Would you like to continue on with your thought about conditioning and how the experiments were made on rats?

JEPSON: Well, I guess I can do so. It was called "Brain Changes in Response to Experience" [by Rosenzweig, Bennett and Diamond]. For instance, they have taken rat litter mates. One-half of the litter mates were put in a sterile, impoverished environment, and the other group they put in a stimulating, enriched, lively environment which allowed them to actively manipulate material they can play with and so on. They did this for a period of twenty-eight days, and then, at the end of twenty-eight days, they destroyed them and using newly developed biochemical tools, measured the differences in the brains in the two groups. And there's a distinct significant difference in the size, weight and chemical content of the brain cells of rats that were in the enriched stimulating environment, so you see that this happens in such a brief period, enough to change the content. The actual brain cells don't multiply, but they do change in size of the cell bodies and nuclei, which accounts for weight and chemical content. Rats from the

enriched environment also had synaptic junctions nearly 50 percent larger. My interest in art as developmental energy-generating activity goes way back to a point before they were able to analyze the molecular content of brain cells and cell fiber. Although brain changes due to experience had been noted as far back as the eighteenth century, that breakthrough came about in 1959 or early '60, by a Swedish microbiologist, Holger Hydén, who developed techniques for measuring changes in the ribonucleic acid, the proteins, and the lipids in the cells of the brain. And he was able to determine--in most cases, by examining the brain cells of animals in which they knew the kind of experience or background these animals had--whether they were raised in dark, for instance, so they couldn't use their eyes, and they analyzed the deprived cells and compared them with those who had normal sight and so on. He was able to speculate about the great differences that he found in the content of some unstimulated cells which had been "deprived," he called it. Although they appeared perfectly normal, the deprived cells were more or less "empty bags," as he put it. More recent studies have been made which make it quite clear that the electrical events in the brain are indicators of ongoing electrochemical process which manufacture and maintain the physical substance in the brain, and it wasn't until they developed

the electroencephalogram that they began to expand the use of such tools for the study of the effects of brain changes on behavior and the effects of behavior on brain changes. My first experience or encounter with that kind of exploration was with my second son. I had two sons and a daughter by my first marriage--I didn't give their names; I suppose I should--my first son, Neil Jepson; then there's Nick Jepson; and my daughter, who was the youngest, Lynn Jepson, died in a flood in Topanga Canyon in the late sixties. But Nick Jepson when he was about two years of age, around 1941, developed what they call petit mal. It's a French term for "little death." It's a form of epilepsy. I noticed that he had these blank spells, and I took him to five or six doctors, and they couldn't tell me what was the matter because he appeared perfectly normal to them. This blankness, which comes only briefly, was such a subtle thing. And I found a fellow that looked in the iris of the eyes, and he was some German chiropractor who was able to diagnose the problem. And he told me that the only treatment for this is medical, and I would have to go to an MD. I found a specialist in the field, and he still wasn't able to tell for sure what the problem was either, but sent me to a man that was one of the originators of this electroencephalograph testing machine. So this was my

first encounter with the idea that there are such things as brain waves. And you could read these changes because this man, by getting my son to breathe fast, caused him to go into one of these spells, and you could see it on the graph as it occurred. My son was cured after a year or so of treatment with drugs.

Since that time, I've been curious about brain waves, [and] I read everything I could about it. I had no idea of its permanent value or significance. For a long time I knew, as everyone knows, that electrical energy is in everything, that there's ambient electrical energy all around everything, and I speculated on that as the source of the electrical energy in the brain and wrote some articles about its relation to creativity. I didn't have any success in having it published because at the time it seemed like such a wild kind of kooky idea anyway. I was way over my head as a layman in referring to the scientific data and so on. But the recent explorations show that this is an indicator of a developmental electrochemical process. That is just a symptom of an ongoing developmental event that changes, develops, and maintains the content of the brain cells. So this brought me to the idea of the importance of attention awareness as a kind of holistic approach to education and the significance of brain changes in

response to experience as an educational goal. It's always been said, whatever you were learning, no matter how you learned it, it was good for you--that practice, somehow, made perfect. But it isn't necessarily so, because with the investigations in parallel things going on, for instance, with biofeedback explorations, this has revealed the fact that thinking, for instance--an analytical thought, a linear thought, or convergent thought, as it is sometimes called--stops many of these interdependent electrical processes, that it stops a lot of concurrent brain activity. They are now developing tools which are far superior to this electroencephalograph. Unquestionably, this will open up a lot of new fields. Most of the people that explore this world are not thinking in terms of developmental growth; they seem to be thinking in terms of therapy correcting mental ailments and so on. They're trying to cure migraine headaches, high blood pressure, and things of that kind through this. But the important thing for me was this revelation in how easy it is to block this energy-generating process simply by thinking or by focusing of attention on outside factors, for instance, like anxiety and fear about what's happening outside. Any kind of defensive analytical thought about future goals or achievement of any kind blocks this energy flow.

Anyway, it is because of this that I have been finally led to this point since I've stopped teaching: to write about it and try to make some kind of sense out of it. There's so much information which seems to be ignored by the psychologists, by educators, by everyone. And it seems to point to the importance of alert attention and awareness, which is the essential feature of the arts as a tool for developmental growth of mind--the whole mind, not just a part. For instance, it's always been my contention that education tends to condition the mind to habitually separate thought from feeling and action, that it's analytical thought that's an abstraction. You're only using a very small part of half the brain. The left hemisphere cortex of the brain is the only thing being used when you're engaged in analytical thought and in any kind of linear thought. Other distractions enter into this because oftentimes particularly in relation to education, [there is] anxiety over punishment or failure, which is a form of self-punishment. Most traditional learning is developing good habits and so on, as they call it. That conditioning is based on reward and punishment, and the survival instincts are directed toward the primitive mind, the part they call the "primitive brain," which is concerned with defense--what they refer to as "fear, fright, and flight." So that if there's any

threat, this subconscious conditioning takes over.

Any kind of anxiety or fear, anger, whatever, shuts down or screens out the activity of the rest of the brain.

There's no question about it.

The new tools they have now are fantastic. They're able to test about twenty times more things than they were when they had the original electroencephalograph, which is relatively very primitive. I visited a man who is a pioneer researcher out in the Valley, Jack Garris, when my son Stephen was taking a course in bio-feedback with him. He gave a demonstration of a machine there that measured They have these little electrodes they put on your head, and the machine would test three different brain waves. And they were very clearly defined by different sounds that you'd hear through earphones, so that you'd know when you develop an alpha wave or a beta wave or a theta wave because it has an entirely different sound, a different tone. And you can very quickly learn to control this in your own brain wave. Without knowing exactly how you do it, you can do it, among many other things. And, anyway, it suggests how fragile this electrochemical process is.

ROGERS: The history of art is filled with stories of the great masters throughout the centuries who have lived under a great deal of stress and yet have produced great works

of art. How would you explain this?

JEPSON: There may be certain conflicts, but I think the emphasis or the capacity If we were completely protected from any kind of stress or tension, we would probably never develop. It seems a certain amount of this stress has some kind of value in developing drive of certain kinds. If you read very carefully into their lives, I think you would discover that some parts of it had considerable tranquility connected with it, also, even in spite of the stress. The stress wasn't continuous, and they also had ways of escaping from the outside things that would divert them. For instance, we were talking about Bernini. He would go twice a day to chapel and meditate, I suppose--Catholics have another term for it. This was a way of reducing stress and increasing awareness for his creative act of the time. And one of the things that he commented about, and his associate commented on, was his ability to detach himself from outside things that were going on. When he was working, he was totally immersed in the work, so much so that he didn't know or care about anything else that was going on around him. And I think this is a capacity that creative people have. There is the inclination to emphasize the stress side of a man's life, conflicts and so on. Somebody like [Vincent] van Gogh, for example--the

kind of anxieties that he had and the conflicts that went on and the fact that he cut off his ear and things of that kind--I think it's a mistake to think that that's why he painted the way he did. I don't think the fact that he tried to rape his doctor's daughter necessarily had too much to do with the kind of painting he did. It had something to do with the fact that there were times when he would be almost immobilized by his neurosis or whatever. I wonder, because at the same time there are other people who seem to be completely free of any of this kind of thing. They also produce a great deal. [Pierre] Renoir. [Paul] Cézanne didn't seem to have any kind of stress; he didn't even have to make a living. He had an income from his father, a banker.

ROGERS: Yet there are so many suicides.

JEPSON: Unquestionably, highly sensitive people may have some imbalances in their lives which cause distress and because they are constantly aware of so many other things going on. But I question seriously To my mind, the art is the healthy side of their developmental energies, if you like, because that's what we've been talking about. To me, there's a heightened awareness and a very healthy development of some part of the brain. The brain is such a complex thing. It's so hard to say that it's this or that. There's a very definite tendency to

emphasize a specialization in various parts of the brain now, between the left and right hemisphere. They give the left hemisphere, if you're right-handed, the analytical, symbol-manipulating capacity of the mind; and the other side is the intuitive, the spontaneous, and the imaginative side of nature.

Unquestionably, there is an interdependence of all parts of the brain. This can be seen in memory. Parts of the brain can be destroyed which ordinarily store things you remember, yet it can be retrieved. The memory can be retrieved from other parts of the brain when one part has been damaged. So there are certain aspects of the brain which are diffuse. However, the most easily conditioned part of the brain has to do with the part of the brain that alerts the activating mechanism at the base of the brain at the head of the brain stem. I think it's called the "reticular formation"; that's the alerting mechanism that makes you awake, that tells you, "Something important is going on; something is happening." And, conversely, the thing--by conditioning--can say, "Nothing is happening; nothing's important; everything is a bore," and this is easily conditioned by schooling or by a lot of things, generally by habits, modes of thought, and by drugs. The thing that disturbs me most about drugs is that it conditions the mind to habitually behave as if nothing was going on, as if, you know, "It's cool;

it's detached; nothing's happening"--you know, "It's all a bore." And one of the reasons that I quit teaching was that I saw this happening among this generation of the last ten years. I could see so many of these kids going to "pot." [It] seems to be the prevalent thing to do. And I could see the changes in this side of the kids who come in highly motivated, energetic, dynamic, and full of life. They would kind of become less and less productive and very cool and detached. And it may be [only] part of it, but the environment of the associates seemed to be directed in this way. I don't know if I mentioned in that movie [The Art of Drawing] we did of my classroom that being cool was the mode of thought. I made that about 1965, I think. But the turning-on mechanism, the subconscious thing that turns on, the learning mechanism in the rest of the brain that tells you to, "Watch out; watch what's happening; see what's going on"--it's a fantastic thing because, for instance, most of us living in cities can get so used to traffic noise we don't hear traffic noise; we sleep through sirens going by, fire engines going by. And in talking about its importance to the brain, we usually refer to how a mother may sleep through fire engines going by or anything, but if the baby whimpers, she's wide awake. [snaps fingers] This is a perfect example of how

conditioning can have a subconscious effect on that mechanism. It's the same, you know, in varying degrees, various levels; it affects our total experience about everything, what's going on, what's happening here and now, at this moment--whether or not you're just mildly interested or very excited about events, it starts right there. That can be just a mild curiosity, or it can have a kind of avalanche effect. In fact, the people who study brain waves and so on refer to it as an "avalanche effect," so that it activates a whole system. But this has been my primary concern because, as I say, very early I learned that drawing was an exciting, stimulating activity, that I was turned on by doing it. There were times when I would work all night, think nothing of it, didn't care a bit about going to sleep or anything, and I knew very early that this was exciting.

That's what they call the excitation of the nerve-energy system. That turn-on is the thing that makes for a full life and actually accounts for the production and the maintenance of physical substance in the brain. Many of these people who write about this speculate about how long it goes on. For instance, rather arbitrarily, they decided that by the time a person is fifty years old that this growth stops. [laughter] If anybody had observed some older people I had breakfast

recently with a woman who is seventy-five, and she is so alert and incredibly conscious of what goes on, and she remembers everything that happens and--not like a lot of people when they get older [and] only think about what happened in the past--she's very aware of all the things that are going on now. And I know other people who are the same way. They don't forget things; they remember so much, keep going, still alert and alive to what's going on. And recent studies of rats made scientists draw the same conclusion: that the cells continue to grow throughout the life of the rat. Now, maybe they don't in humans; I think they probably do. I think people who become more and more bored with life, detached from life, are probably suffering from some nerve-energy deprivations, due to lack of stimulation, like the rat. Psychological withdrawal is even more deleterious than confinement in sterile environments, so that, in various degrees, you go so far as to be in a sort of catatonic state, not aware and not involved. It's a very fragile thing, and it seemed to me that schools pay no attention whatever to this. They are very aware of the children who are alert and alive. I think conditioning that we see where learning becomes restrictive and convergent to a point that it doesn't involve the whole being in a total awareness of all the senses, both the

mind and the body, causes the trouble. At least as far as I'm concerned, [in] most learning, most education--this goes for art schools as well as the other schools--it's quite obvious that the failures to get students totally involved are more notable than the successes. I mean, how many creative people come out? The tendency is to say, "Well, he's not talented enough." Talent--what does that mean? My point of view is that all people have a potential for growth and development, and this is where the creativity comes from. Because it has to do with action or it has to be an active mode of learning, it might be better referred to as "manipulativity," but manipulation in that you can manipulate things and be very detached at the same time. My son Stephen suggests that "activator" is a better term. I am inclined to agree because the artist is essentially an activator of his inner and outer environment. I would think that if we focus on the idea that developmental growth is involved and concern ourselves with the motivational drive for the developmental energy which seems to characterize not only just humans but other animals, the primary drive for stimulation of nerve-energy needs seems to be characteristic of all animals, and anything that inhibits or restricts, restrains that need to manipulate or explore, to investigate the environment and to be

actively involved with it seems to be harmful. Where are we now? Can we stop awhile? [tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: At what point in your career as a teacher were you able to start applying, from a practical point of view, this theory that you were evolving?

JEPSON: Well, actually, it started with my own work. I had attempted to change my own work before I started to try to develop some new ways of working with the students. I had practiced drawing and taught drawing as a kind of how-to-do-it sort of thing for so long, and I developed a kind of skill in this direction and a lot of information about art and the nature of composition. Like all teachers, I had reduced it to a kind of formal system which seemed to be effective and very much in demand. I had a large following of students and so on. Before I was able to really change around and do something entirely different with them, I had to explore within myself some of the things that were sort of stirring around in my own mind. I began to recognize for quite a while that what I was doing, no matter how much I would try, I had been conditioned by my own mode of thinking and practice, working over and over, that I was repeating things. The change wasn't easy. I was always trying to change and grow and develop, but this wasn't taking place because

of all these encumbrances I had acquired through conditioning and practice. And having realized that practice makes you pretty dull, I decided that I had to do something pretty drastic.

I began to ask questions about judgments; teachers who teach as much as I did, become almost automatic critics. And I recognized I was criticizing my own work. All the time I was aware I was being analytical and criticizing and always dominated by preconceptions that were already in my head. So I began to try to think about ways that would disrupt this, would inhibit my habits, as it were. And about that time, one day I had an appointment to meet somebody downtown, and for some reason I got there early. I had about an hour to wait, and there was one of these movies that would go on in the daytime, all-day movies, I guess. So I thought, "I'll go in there." And it was my habit, always, to carry my sketchbook in my pocket; I always had something to draw with just as a habit. So I went in there, and when you go into one of those movies on a bright day, you go in there, and it is black. I couldn't see anything but the screen, and it was one of those B-grade movies where the same characters keep coming on and on, so I decided to draw them, but without seeing what I was doing. I just took my pencil out of my pad and started to draw--no

effort to see. There was no way that I could see what I was doing in that dark place, and I decided that it might be interesting. When I got out, I looked at these drawings--the movie was a lousy movie--I decided that they had qualities that none of my other drawings had at all because I couldn't judge or couldn't question what I was doing. I didn't even know where I was on the page or anything else, really. And I decided that the consciousness of what's going on, the direction of attention to the way you feel about what you're doing, what's going on inside, is probably the most important factor of all.

So I would say that from then on most of my attention was trying to develop a kind of conscious awareness in myself and in my students, but as I say, I had to do it first quite a long time. I really didn't get a chance to explore it as much as I wanted to until I closed my school and started to work at the Otis Art Institute. And at that point, I decided there that I'm really going to turn around and completely change the emphasis away from judgment and criticism of effects, to focus more on the idea of increasing sensitivity and awareness and responsiveness to ongoing processes rather than to focus on the end product. At that point, I stopped criticizing or judging students' work. We'd put work up on the wall only as a way of saying, "By the way, this is what happened."

And we'd look at it from an entirely different point of view, not as something particularly related to any kind of premise or preconception of any kind.

Analysis and judgment implies an authority, and I think that the burden of the authority of the arts of the past is a very restrictive thing to put on students because students are always placed in a position of inferiority. They're inferior to the teacher, and if they question and doubt the teacher, he can always appeal to a higher authority, the old master or a masterwork of some kind. And this, I think, is a great encumbrance. That doesn't mean that they shouldn't look at the masters and find meaning. In terms of your own responses and awareness, what it does to you is something that's usually ignored. It's always a detached something out there that placed the goal that you have to achieve, [which] is somehow remote.

That's why I like the idea of the purpose of education being the developmental growth, because when you think about somebody's development and growth, it's organic, like his size or the color of his hair. You can't judge it and say, you know, "Now, what you need is to grow another inch taller." [laughter] When you talk about organic growth, you're referring to the whole being. You're not talking about any kind of value system.

ROGERS: What you're saying, then, is that art can't be taught. It has to be learned.

JEPSON: Well, I think that when we focus on art itself, this is the mistake. It seems to me that it ought to be an extension of the life process, of a total state of being aware. And I think that things that are felt intensely enough, if you're really with it--and a part of being with it is that you have something in your hands which you can act out how you feel about the thing--this becomes almost like a biological imperative. It's this way because it has to be so.

ROGERS: But this puts the responsibility of learning on the student, and it's a very self-disciplinary, fine mind that a young artist must develop. How do you encourage that?

JEPSON: Well, it would seem to me that one thing that's really characteristic Anybody can think about it from the time they can remember anything, that when you were excited about what you were doing, this is fulfilling, nourishing, meaningful, and you do it because you love it. You like it; you like the way you feel. The feeling exceeds any other reward. When discipline is placed outside, it becomes an arbitrary, external reward. To my mind, this is the basis of social anxiety and fear. People should learn because they love to learn,

because they're curious--they like to explore, they're inquisitive, they care. It seems to be a primary drive for the stimulation of nerve-energy needs in all animals, as I said before, to search for stimulation and energy, and this is where it comes from, because it comes from inner feelings during the exploration of our environment and the material and the things that we are confronted with and act upon as a kind of a catalyst between our inner and outer world.

TAPE NUMBER: III, SIDE TWO

JUNE 10, 1976

ROGERS: If we're all creatures of habit, then there's ways that we have to try and free ourself, and this is what you were trying to do.

JEPSON: Yes, I think so, The thing that I've come to realize, and I think that we should all recognize, is that something in us keeps us from behaving in original ways and keeps us from recognizing the uniqueness of each event. The question isn't, "Are we creative?" or "Are we original?" or "Are we unique?" The question is, "Why do we behave as if we weren't unique?" and "Why do we behave as if things aren't different all of the time?" One essential fact of life is that things are in constant change and flux. Things are always different; no two things are alike. And because of our habit of analyzing, classifying things, this rigidity tends to carry over into everything we do. Things are approached as if we already know what's there, what's going to happen, what we're going to get out of it, what we're going to do with it and so on. And as a consequence, we fail to recognize this, the uniqueness of a kind of evolving process of life that goes on all the time. There's nothing in the world that isn't undergoing the same kind

of evolving process of life that goes on all the time. There's nothing in the world that isn't undergoing the same kind of change. Even this table or all the stuff is undergoing some kind of change, molecular change, even though it isn't observable outside. For practical reasons, we need to identify things as being a certain way. We have to recognize that we automatically accept the fact that a red light means stop and a green light means go when we're driving a car. The uniqueness of things isn't brought to our attention. Children are started out in school learning to classify, to pigeon-hole, to put things in categories; and the kind of attention awareness that is needed for the development of creative activity has to do with the kind of excitement that we get out of the uniqueness of the experiences that we have. This is essential to growth itself.

In going back a little bit to the idea of the turn-on, that particular activating information of the brain that alerts the mind and turns it on has to be very close to what they call the "pleasure center" of the brain. I've read about experiments where they stimulate these vitally important structures electrically in humans as well as animals, so the satisfaction that starts right there through a whole cluster of structures dominating instinctive "gut" feelings regulating emotion,

motivational drives and needs seems to be very closely associated with this one area which monitors and censors what's happening in the rest of the brain and body. Consequently, they discovered that when they'd take these poor rats and put a thing in the top of their heads where the rat is able to press a lever that gives him the pleasure, they'll find that the stimulation of that pleasure center in the brain exceeds all other drives--for sex or hunger, food, or anything else. You see, he'll go hungry rather than give up the stimulation of this part of the brain. Discipline isn't the thing that's needed at all. It's something to do with an innate drive that's there already, that it's merely suppressed, somehow, or deprived, or it is restrained or restricted in some way.

In any case, there are all kinds of experiments that they've gone through to condition centers of the brain to restrict and restrain certain kinds of behavior which inhibit sensory motor and perceptual involvement. And invariably, it induces anxiety. For instance, they put two monkeys in restraining chairs and fastened them to the seat and arms--maybe you read that. The article was in the Scientific American, called "Ulcers in Executive Monkeys," [laughter] which I thought was very good, appropriate as a paradigm of repression that is similar to classrooms everywhere. Both monkeys had a lever,

but only one monkey has a lever that really controls whether or not he'll get punished with an electric shock, and this monkey gets ulcers from his task of avoiding punishment. The other monkey--I don't know how long they keep him going--he apparently doesn't get ulcers so quickly; he merely gets bored and indifferent at the whole thing. It seemed to me that that picture of those two monkeys sitting there in those restraining chairs was so close to the pictures I'd seen of the anxiety on children's faces in the lower grades of school, sitting there full of anxiety and worry about the unnatural restrictive tasks that passive detached learning forces upon them. But it would seem that the innate drives for excitation and stimulation and nourishment from nerve energy is a pleasure-giving activity. It gives pleasure, maybe because the turn-on of that whole system is so close to the pleasure center of the brain. Now, animals seem to have the same thing. It's a part of the lower brain, a part of the so-called "animal brain." And I think there's a great tendency to discount and ignore the importance of the limbic brain and brain stem. Now there's a lot of focus on attention between the right and left hemisphere, and they talk about educating the whole brain, but it usually returns to just the right and left hemisphere; they don't pay too much attention to some of the most

compelling aspects of the whole sensory-motor-perceptual system as being the key to the balanced growth of the whole intelligence, as far as I'm concerned.

ROGERS: Where does the connection between the lower brain and the pleasure centers come in the transition to the abstract thinking?

JEPSON: Well, most impulses going to the "cognitive" part of the brain are dependent on the center. If you read comments by people like Einstein, some of these great mathematicians, you'll find that their attention is initially directed to a kind of intuitive gut feeling. The initial innovative thought starts there. The bringing together of the symbols, the search for the symbols that are being used, comes later, much later, as a means of completing the idea. And I heard in some cases--Einstein even had a mathematician that worked with him; he wasn't that great as a mathematician. One of Einstein's statements was that scientists should think like poets. That was his contribution. Such statements are ignored by studies of creativity, which is approached as if it were a problem-solving enterprise. If you knew what the problem was, you would learn to solve the problem according to certain principles and rules.

One thing I learned very soon was that you can make anything into a system if you're determined to do

so. You can reduce it to a kind of formalized how-to-do-it, so that the focus of attention is on procedure and the idea rather than how you feel, here and now, about the process. The whole notion of creativity in the arts is that the whole being should somehow be involved and that it should be not fragmented or separated. Creativity is a state of being aware. And I would think it applies to all forms of mental innovative thought or creative thought. "Creativity" is somehow too vague a term--there's something wrong with that term. As I mentioned before, I thought "manipulativity" would be a better term because it seems to be more general; it seems to describe what's going on. Yet mere manipulation could take place as a kind of fragmented and detached activity, too. The manipulativity that I'm thinking of has to do with a kind of total awareness, both mental and physical. The idea of the separation is a false notion; there is no real separation. Objectivity is a myth. There is really no such thing as complete objectivity.

ROGERS: Being an artist is a very subjective thing. Aren't we talking about each one making a visual interpretation?

JEPSON: Well, you know, they talk about the visual arts. But I sometimes wonder. What came from the experiment where I drew in the dark without seeing what I was doing was:

I had a visual thing, eventually; there was an object or drawing I would look at, but it has to do with a kind of total ongoing awareness of both inner and outer things, where the artist becomes a catalyst of something that doesn't really exist in any other form--kind of consciousness that may be, oh, I suppose, like a dream. What's to say? It certainly isn't necessarily translatable into verbal terms because it has to do with the larger areas of the brain, which are mute, even though we verbalize about it. One of the things that I've always objected to in art was the assumption that if you knew about it, then you might be able to apply it. The students would come to a drawing class, maybe a life class where we're drawing the figure, and the assumption is, if I can know about that figure, if I can learn about it, then I'll be able to use this knowledge and express myself. The tendency in education is to teach about things, and to my mind, this is a roundabout sort of spectator-oriented approach. We live in an alienated spectator-oriented society, which wants to know about things but not to identify with or get involved with things. And the detached, passive approach to learning isn't inclusive enough because learning has to, above all, be active; it cannot be passive. That doesn't mean that we need to overtly act it out, but I think [we

need] to be aware of it as kind of an active, changing, developing thing, not as a collection of static entities of some kind which we combine and rearrange and put together in our heads.

ROGERS: When you talked about drawing in the dark, this was an experience for you of reaching into a new dimension. Have you ever had dreams or extrasensory experiences that might have created the same kind of condition for you? Is this a method of reaching out into a new dimension?

JEPSON: Well, I don't know. This could be so. I've always avoided any speculation about transcending my own physical being. It would seem to me that until we know about the extents of, increases in, sensory acuity, sensory awareness, there's no more point in going to things that might come from some outside source other than the internal and external interaction that's going on within ourselves. One of the things about art [is], unless there is something that comes out of it that seems to be a surprise--that you don't know where it came from--you've missed something. If you only produce what you already have anticipated and expect, there is something amiss about that, and this is one of the reasons why I question Millard Sheets's approach to what he was doing, in that he had always had an idea what it was going to

be--although I think when he was younger there was enough vitality and spontaneity in what he did, that there was always something unexpected for him to come out and it seemed to have some of that quality. It's only later that it became sort of stereotyped.

I devised a lot of different exercises for my students in hopes to break their habits and modes of thought, but this is extremely difficult. It's only by an exaggerated change in physical conditions that it becomes manageable. So much is just built by habit into our fingers and wrists--as well as our minds--that it's very difficult. And when I started to work again in sculpture, around 1968 or '69, I started working with plywood, bending it, because I had never done it before and I thought that I would have a material that offered opportunities for new experiences there that would tell me what to do, which is what I really wanted. I wanted it to be a kind of exploration, a kind of discovery. After working with it for a while, for a couple of years, I discovered that I was turning right around into making preconceived forms, where I would plan what to do and no longer felt the stimulation and excitement that comes from manipulating new materials. So I decided after doing a couple of dozen sculptures, "Well, that's enough of that. I don't want to do that." I don't know,

maybe it was just an excuse, an alibi for getting lazy.

[laughter]

ROGERS: Could you elaborate a little more on the exaggerated conditions that you gave your students to break away from habit?

JEPSON: Well, first of all, the entire premise of my classes was that things were different all the time; everything is different. We don't go to it as if now we know about it. If we do, we'll practice putting down what we know, what we've learned, because this brings about repetition. So the idea that the experience here and now, this moment, is unique and you bring as much intensity to that as you can is the important thing. By changing any factor--and sometimes they have to be rather extreme factors, such as the focus of attention on another location--to some other area where you haven't explored before is one way of doing that, even if they have to think about movement in their arm as starting from the soles of their feet, you know, as if it came up through them in that way. There are infinite possibilities for variation just in doing the simplest act. This is the kind of exercise that drama coaches are very much into to get people to develop an awareness of themselves.

One time I thought it would be a good idea if all

subjects were taught by drama teachers, so the people wouldn't just learn about things, they would play a role of somebody that was into what they were doing. It is quite a different thing to just read Shakespeare than to play the role of one of those characters. And from time to time, I've heard about different teachers who I thought were really on the right track. I heard about the ex-actress who was teaching English literature at the university in the Valley, but I never met her, never had a chance to visit her class or anything. One of my former students was telling me about her because he knew I was interested in active learning, about how she got the students involved in English literature.

ROGERS: Do you remember who she was?

JEPSON: No, I can't even remember. One time I wrote her name down in a notebook and then proceeded to lose it some way. But it would seem to me that those people who are able to get people kind of totally involved are the ones who are the great teachers. In Pasadena they have a "basic studies" program--which sounds terrible, you know, reading, writing, arithmetic, because "Now we're getting back to the so-called basic fundamentals." I saw this on television on the educational station. It was a structured program of first- and second-grade students reading. And here was a woman who had them

involved in all their senses. They were singing; it was like an opera. They were studying phonetics or something of that kind, and they were acting it out. It was a very imaginative, dynamic thing. I only saw it briefly, and I thought, "Wow. There is a teacher who is really getting these kids involved in learning to read in a way that was obviously [exciting]." Their whole beings were involved in tactile auditory and muscular activity. The whole class just vibrated. There wasn't any of the kind of dull detachment that you see so often in classrooms. Actually the words they were learning were very mundane, very dull, and basically very uninteresting. [laughter] It would bore the poor kids to death if it hadn't been for this teacher, I'm sure. So it isn't so much the subject or the content as how it's taught, I think. Maybe that's content to some people; I don't know how educators use those terms.

But my whole drive, the whole purpose in teaching, was to try to get people totally involved and committed, get them motivated and turned on. The ones that turned on, they'd go! They don't need the teacher very much. But there's so many of them already conditioned by the society we're in and by the anxieties associated with the way they've learned things--worry about goals and ends to be achieved. The whole search for external

reward seems to me to be the cause for neurotic anxiety throughout life. It seems to come from greed for external reward from the outside, somehow, rather than from intrinsic satisfaction from within the person himself.

ROGERS: What you're describing, then, is a person who can somehow maintain his individuality, be a nonconformist, survive the public school system, and in the meantime grow in skill with his art, who eventually would turn out to be a very creative--well, there we're using the word again--a great artist.

JEPSON: Well, you know, if he came out as a great person My thought always has been--since I take the point of view that every child, no matter who he is, has a potential for growth--if he is allowed to grow and reach at least part of this potential, he may maintain his sense of worth and identity and be a great carpenter or at least a great person of some kind. And the tendency to try to force students into abstract thinking, linear thought which separates thought from feeling and action, is kind of an unnatural tightwire stunt that's required of very young kids. Some are high achievers, but they are the easiest victims of the whole thing as much as those who don't get it at all or are turned off by it.

ROGERS: In applying this theory to music, I have often

heard jazz musicians say that you needed a strong classical background and training in order to play good jazz.

JEPSON: Well, there again, classical background, what does that mean? The way it's taught? How it's taught? I remember as a young man, I had a close friend who suddenly decided on his own (not one of these who was forced to take piano lessons) suddenly decided that he wanted to be a pianist, and he was very fortunate in getting a very creative kind of teacher. And in a year's time, he had become what I thought was an excellent pianist, a very sensitive pianist. Now obviously he was working with a man who didn't just pound finger exercises on him, but he acquired the same ability. I mean he was playing classical music and so on. But, oh, what a difference, because I'd heard others, you know, throughout life, friends and family who played, and none of them could come near matching this fellow in the very short time. Survival required that he go into his father's business, and I think he finally gave the whole thing up, but, you know, that's one of those things. But the idea that there are prerequisites is deceptive. The only prerequisite that I would accept is the prerequisite that we learn to conform to nature and use our whole being. That is the only prerequisite that I think can

be essential. Let's put it this way: no particular degree or kind of knowledge seemed to be essential because great artists come from periods where there was very little tradition behind it. We have a society now where all the work is available in reproductions, in books, museums and so on. We can go to museums and see all these things. We have all this vast store, but it doesn't seem to contribute anything to creativity--I mean, in terms of numbers, when you consider the vast numbers of students in art school. After World War II, somebody wrote a PhD dissertation about the majors in the art schools in colleges, and through his researches into the past, the number of students who were in the class, he concluded that there were more art major students in colleges and art schools in the United States than there had been throughout the history of the world. [laughter] I don't know where he got his numbers, but it seems to come back to the whole thing that our failures are much more notable than our successes. And I think that is also true in every field in education. I think it's a crime. Disaster--that's the way I look at it when I think of all those poor kids that go through school and hate it, and then most of them drop out and become completely alienated social misfits. Nothing ever turns them back on. When I think how close I came to

giving up the whole thing Here I am involved in writing and talking about education at this point in my life, but before, when I was seventeen, I would say I was ready for God knows what--for anything. But I wouldn't have gone onto art school if I hadn't gotten a scholarship. That would have been it.

ROGERS: Just for the sake of the chronology of your teaching--you say that these theories that you were evolving during those years of your own school came at the end of your involvement in your own school, and so you decided to close the school. Would you like to talk a little bit about the circumstances of the closing of your school and what happened after that?

JEPSON: Well, when I closed the school I don't remember exactly what year the Korean War started--they didn't call it a war, they called it something else--but that seemed to drain the potential students away from the school. I saw a considerable drop in enrollment at that time. After six years of the GI Bill there was a drop in enrollment so that the economics, you know, the funds needed to go on, was kind of limited. During that whole period, say somewhere around 1947, my marriage began to break up, and my first wife, Guilia, left and moved with our three children to the Big Bear mountains, and then she moved to Laguna Beach. We had trial

separations and so on. And then, around 1950, after a long legal hassle over financial separation and so on, we got a divorce. I always tell people that she got the assets, and I got the business. [laughter] So I had no working capital left, so it was a financial struggle the last couple of years of the school to keep it going.

Rico Lebrun was sort of a dynamic force there, the one person that sort of kept me going, kept me kind of pepped up because he was that kind of a friend. He wanted to move to Mexico, and I was having misgivings about a lot of things. Some of the students had been quite successful. Some of them have been teaching in places as far away as Australia, England, and France, where one of them started an art school in Paris. Fred Hammersley--I made him a teacher in my school. And I think I should discuss some of those people, too, because as I pointed out earlier, a lot of people who didn't know him took the point of view that somehow Lebrun was the kind of person who wanted a school of Lebrun followers, and it was quite the opposite. A lot of those very successful people who continue to work, like Fred Hammersley--who was, I think, on the cover of that magazine I showed you

ROGERS: Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art Journal.

JEPSON: Yeah, Fred was one of the early hard-edge abstractionists. He was a student in the school, and he became a teacher. Bob Irwin was a student in the school, and he is not a figurative man. John Canavier, who taught at Chouinard for many years and now is teaching out at Cal State University, Northridge, his work is all nonfigurative, quite abstract. And so, you know, there were a lot of people with different ideas, and some of the people like John Canavier worked with Lebrun as an assistant for two years in his studio, and he never imitated his style or anything like that. So I think there's a lot of misconception about Lebrun's role and the effect he had on people who worked with him. He was more a kind of a thinker and an inspiration for people that wanted to go in other directions quite different from his. I don't know how anybody could really follow him except to mimic him in a more superficial way, because he was a bombastic, romantic Italian. I think as a young man in Italy he won some kind of a poetry prize.

ROGERS: How did you and he respond to the nonfigurative work that the young students were doing?

JEPSON: Oh, Lebrun's own work was becoming less and less representational, and everything was encouraged there. It was a very free open place. There was one person mentioned by Macdonald-Wright--Gil Henderson. When he

came into the school, he was a very dynamic young man who had studied in San Francisco, which was all "action painting" in those days, and he came in doing this kind of thing. And he was a very aggressive young fellow, and Howard Warshaw wanted to kick him out of school because he thought he was a disruptive element. And I refused; I delighted in having him there. One other boy, Irving Silvey, who's still in art and art education in Australia, was doing all kinds of pop art and everything else. You know, twelve years later this became the thing to do, and I can remember he was a contrary kind of perverse character. [laughter] I thought he was great; he was a very independent, talented boy. And there was no objection to him being there. He was sort of an oddball. To get an idea of his temperament, toward the last, I was upset about the direction some of the classes seemed to be taking because they seemed to be overly authoritarian and dogmatic. I was having problems with one of the teachers, and he came to me and said, "Why don't you fire all those guys and hire me. I'll teach all those classes." He was very much like a lot of the young guys today, I think, very much like them.

ROGERS: Did you have staff meetings where you tried to talk about theory of teaching?

JEPSON: Oh, yes, lots of those. We were doing a lot

that. It was a period of changing perception for us all. It was an open thing; if somebody was giving a talk, everybody would go in there and listen to him. At any time, teachers would go in classes and work right alongside the students.

ROGERS: Was there some tension in the staff meetings about how art education should be approached?

JEPSON: No, most of the time we kept on pretty general terms. That kind of thing was something I tried to keep away from in those meetings. This one teacher was a good teacher, but his tendency was to kind of get on a soap-box and kind of put down the other teachers, which is very difficult in the school situation; you have to be a good colleague, no matter what. I mean it doesn't do the students too much good, and I didn't think so, and I felt that he was kind of rough on the girl students; I guess you'd call him the "male chauvinist." There were certain men in his classes who were treated as the stars. It goes back to the kind of kindergarten thing where they give people stars, I suppose. It seems to me to be the same thing, where you say this one's a star. It implies that the others are not stars, and I objected to this.

ROGERS: Do you have any objection to naming the teacher?

JEPSON: Well, no, not particularly, because it was Howard

Warshaw. We're still good friends, but I did fire him because I just couldn't quite cope with it. And when I think back, it wasn't all his fault; it was probably my fault as well. Probably some of these problems were conflicts about the nature of the whole purpose of the school, you know, at that point. So I probably just took it out on him. Earlier, when Howard went back to teach in Iowa, I heaved a sigh of relief in a way, in spite of the fact that he was a very dynamic person and a very bright, intelligent guy. But when he went back to [the University of] Iowa, he didn't get along back there either. That may be just gossip. I talked to [Lester] Longman, who was the department head, and some of those people felt that he didn't fit in too well back there, and he only lasted a year. And when he came back, he swore that he had turned over a new leaf, that he wasn't going to be so much a . . . I don't know, whatever you call them; he wasn't a radical, exactly, but kind of a trouble-maker. [laughter] And he swore that he wouldn't [be] if I'd take him back, so I did, but I finally ended up firing him. But when I think back on it, we couldn't seem to agree on what we were even talking about, because I was trying to suggest that it was undemocratic--probably it wasn't the right term to use--to treat any student as inferior. He said that wasn't an issue at all; they could

either come to the class or get out of the class of their own free will; so that wasn't an issue.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE ONE

JUNE 17, 1976

ROGERS: You were discussing Howard Warshaw's attitude toward women the last time we were together. Would you like to continue in that vein?

JEPSON: Well, I think Howard Warshaw's view of women actually reflects a kind of authoritarian view of his role as an artist and how he viewed the works of other artists of the past. He was very keen about the importance of the masters and the way he perceived what they did, and the concepts that he developed were built around the way he viewed their roles. This view is itself an appeal to authority, which I think inevitably leads to a star system, scholastic methods evaluating art and artists in a kind of a hierarchy of their importance and significance. If it's consistent, it is a mode of thought that would inevitably lead to the treatment of students in the same way, whether they were women or men. Essentially, Howard is very intellectual and prides himself in his scholarship, which was considerable, and his evaluations, his analysis of the works of the past and the works of art, and the directions where he felt art should go. It's typical, I think, that in giving assignments, he established the premise that was verbally well articulated,

clearly defined, and it wasn't that he didn't have a high appreciation of works that might deviate from that or might not illustrate the premise that he established. Nevertheless, that was the basis for his way of teaching, which is, I would say, a restrictive formal approach.

I think it also reflected somewhat his tendency to treat women as inferior; this was brought out in a kind of discussion that wasn't--it wasn't an argument exactly, but a difference of opinion about directions that we might go in the educational programs at the school. I always felt that he was on a soapbox or something, whatever he was doing. I think this is wonderful for an artist. He has to be that way; he has to be sure that he's on the right track and the right direction at the time, and that doesn't exclude him from changing and getting on another soapbox at another time. But at this same time, he was so emphatic that it caused a conflict and stress between him and some of the teachers.

This would probably be best illustrated by discussions that went on between Howard Warshaw and Milly Rocque, who was one of my first teachers that I had hired when I started the school and who was chosen by Rico Lebrun--with my approval, of course--to take over his classes when he gave up the regular teaching assignments, which he had done two or three days a week for a long period

of time. Wanting to complete a series of things that he was doing for the Crucifixion series and so on, at that point he decided that he could only come in about once a month and lecture at the school. So somebody had to take over the routine of the drawing classes, which Milly Rocque took over. And this argument--or this discussion--between Rocque and Warshaw, as I said, seemed to be symbolic of a kind of split that I had felt for a long time in the world of art education. As education became more and more allied with the university system, the kind of learning that they expected from those classes in art was one that would fit into the academic formula, based primarily on evaluation and assessment of the works of the past. It has become, I felt, more and more spectator-oriented in the sense that judgment of its value seemed to be based primarily on the formal analytical approach to art, to the arts of the past in particular, and in the so-called studio classes--"lab" classes, I think they call them in the colleges or universities--a kind of how-to-do-it system which can be graded and assessed in terms of prerequisites and premises that are established. This to my mind seemed to be a fragmented approach. I call it a conceptual spectator-oriented approach to art education. It seems to get more and more towards a detached passive assessment

of the works of others, rather than getting people involved and committed. I was on some kind of a radio panel a short time later, when I was teaching at the Otis Art Institute, in which I made the suggestion that education should be directed toward the whole man, rather than just toward his intellectual capacities. But I didn't get very far because I was in a panel with three professors, led by Dr. Paul Laporte who was in charge of the program, and this is their game and their world. I didn't have much of an effect on the discussion.

[laughter] But in my own [world]--this was as far as the school was concerned--this was my own field, and Milly Rocque was the kind of person who was focusing more attention on the general awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness towards ongoing events--whatever was happening at the time. And her capacity to motivate and develop students was remarkable, way beyond any other teacher that I have ever known. In any case, there was a discussion, I recall very clearly, between Howard Warshaw and Milly Rocque in which he said to her, "Well, you take care of their haptic sensibilities, and I'll take care of their intellect." This upset Milly Rocque no end. Actually, what he was saying to her was indirectly very complimentary, in fact, because what she was trying to do was to get the students' whole being actively involved

in what they were doing, and not like Warshaw, who seemed to be trying to get students to work off the top of their heads. The term "haptic" came from a book by Herbert Read called Education through Art. And in this book, Read had referred to "haptic sensibility," a phrase that he made out of the Greek term, haptikos, which means to touch, to feel, to lay hold of and to have power over. It is a term which comes close to the idea of the artist as an activator of internal feelings and external events. Like all terms it can have various meanings, depending on the context in which it is used; nevertheless, Warshaw's use of the term emphasized a kind of split between the intuitive and spontaneous spatial awareness of the mind and the analytical conceptual part of the intellect (although at that point none of the scientific data related to this problem was known to us at that time). The sensory-motor-perceptual interdependent system involves a greater part of the brain, for example, and it is a holistic kind of brain and body relationship that traditional education seldom pays any attention to at all. It's only, since about 1950 that a man by the name of Carl Rogers, who's doing research up at Caltech on split brains--he has been doing a lot of experiments with people whose brains have been split between the left hemisphere and the right hemisphere (these are people

with incurable epilepsy). And then he has conducted a lot of experiments between these two to determine the function of the two hemispheres of the brain. The structural, verbal, analytical side of the brain seems to be pretty much centered in the cortex of the left hemisphere which is the hemisphere that relates to your right arm. This function is usually referred to as the "dominant" hemisphere, because as soon as the mind starts to analyze in a kind of linear and convergent fashion, it cuts off the electrochemical activity in the rest of the brain. It's called the "dominant" hemisphere, and sometimes it's called the "major" hemisphere and then you refer to the other side as the "minor" hemisphere of the brain as if it were less important. In recent years there's been a lot of investigation going on in relation to this split between the two halves of the brain. They discovered that we really have two brains in addition to the lower primitive brain, that any one of the three can operate independently of the other; and in the case of the dominant side, analytical, linear thought almost completely cuts off stimulation of nerve energy needed for the development of the other parts of the brain. When this was discovered, it was a source of great excitement for me because I had the idea that somehow we weren't paying enough attention to the whole brain in

education. And I had long felt that assumption that universities, for example, were concerned with the education of the whole man was a myth. I think it's pretty well confirmed: the exclusive focus of attention on technological skills and knowledge about subjects rather than an inclusive focus on identification and involvement with the material are two quite different modes of learning because the latter includes growth and change in the model of the process. So I think that traditional education is a little bit less than half-brained; this is the way I look at it. [laughter] It has that quality. And also, as I think I mentioned before, the idea that training this part of the brain is and reinforced through reward and punishment is using, actually, the defense functions of the lower brain, which is sometimes called the "primitive" brain and it uses the subconscious fear-fight-or-flight mechanism to enforce the fragmented conditioning of the mind.

ROGERS: Did Milly Rocque understand this when she developed her theory of education?

JEPSON: I don't think she thought of it as a theory. It was more of an extension of her lifelong interest as an artist. You see, so much of this is fairly recent; even the thought about it has just been indirectly hinted at. For instance, Herbert Read, in his book,

discusses this as if this was an inherent characteristic that some people are haptic types and others were intellectual types and so on, as if this was an inborn characteristic which was unique in certain cases among certain peoples; in addition he points out that primitives are generally haptic types. It's been so long since I read that book that I wouldn't know; it didn't seem to me that much emphasis was placed on the fact that almost all Eastern philosophy and education is directed toward the intuitive right hemisphere, rather than a rational intellectual, logical side.

But, in any case, these things intuitively are understood by most people, and I think that a kind of militant emphasis on conditioning which separates thought from feeling and action is something that seems very wrong to even very young kids; they're confused by it and disturbed by it and very soon develop anxiety and frustration over the demands that this restrictive kind of education puts upon them. But in reference to that, it's curious: postmortem examination of children who have been killed or died for some reason or another, up to the age of eight, show a balanced development of both left and right hemispheres. There are some researchers in, I think, New York University or one of those places who have been measuring brain sizes of different people.

They have no idea of how these people were raised, but a cross section of brains of Americans examined show that over 65 percent of them have a greater development of the left hemisphere than the right. It's long been known that musicians, in particular, where they've examined their brains after death, they find that they're either balanced in development or, often, a greater development on the right side.

In any case, it would seem that the argument going on there was between these two views between these two teachers. I would have to give Milly credit for really turning me around as a teacher because she showed me how. I think in a way she instinctively managed to turn on students in a rather structured, disciplined way with her classes by giving them exercises which were simple--they weren't restrictive--and she managed at the same time to develop a great deal of flexibility in their thinking and the way they worked and so on. She had a rather simple way of doing it.

ROGERS: Could you give me an example of what type of exercise would be different from the type Warshaw would give his students?

JEPSON: Well, only that the focus of attention was not on the premise, the idea, the analysis, effects, but on just simple attention and awareness, in an effort to

develop increased sensitivity and responsiveness to on-going events, on what was happening, here and now, let's say, as they were working. So the focus was more on how they were learning, the way they were learning, than on the results in their drawings. See, I think this all comes back to my own questions. I stopped reading about art and art history or not paying too much attention to the writings of historians because I felt that in almost every case they somehow missed the developmental growth of the artist, except, as they would see it, as a kind of historical sequence or from anecdotes about their lives--who they were married to or something like that. It seemed to me to completely miss how they got that way. This is important because it seemed that the words they used and the descriptions they used could apply to most anyone. You could apply it to most any artist--there was very little difference in the explanation--yet the real differences in their performances as artists were tremendous. It's very difficult because what we're dealing with when we try to go into things of this kind--we're dealing with intuitive and spontaneous feelings and responses that are probably more poetic. Maybe poetic expression would be the only kind of thing that might come close. When you talk about inner feelings, awareness, and attention, and things of that kind, you are getting into

a nonverbal area, actually. And yet these are the things that have to do with the stimulation and growth of creative intelligence. Creativity is a term that's been kicked around to mean a lot of things by a lot of different people. Some hairdressers call themselves creative. So I don't know. I much prefer the terms "manipulator" or "activator." Both seem to be more expressive of what goes on, yet the manipulation of external elements can be as detached and as mechanical and as formal a system as any other kind of intellectual activity. Let's stop for a minute, and

[tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: You mentioned that the conflict between you and Howard Warshaw was resolved with your releasing him from the faculty. Did the attitude that Milly Rocque have prevail at the school then, after the leaving of Warshaw?

JEPSON: I wouldn't say that it was dominant, necessarily. The school didn't carry on much beyond that--maybe a year or so at the most. I can't remember exactly how long it was, but I think that Milly at least reflected a point of view that was common in the school, at least among some of the teachers, especially Rico Lebrun, because if you would read his book on drawing, for instance, you find that--of course, he's very Italian and very bombastic, very romantic man, but beneath all this, you'll

find he talks about visceral gut feelings and the importance of intuitive action in his work. And in all my discussions with him, he would talk to me about this side of his own nature, and explain how it embarrassed him to talk to some of the other teachers about it because they were so keen on the analytical approach to art. It was his feeling that the uniqueness was the intuitive metaphoric side of thought that was most important to him. Any kind of school following of him as a kind of master, let's say, bothered him, disturbed him. Because of his dynamic personality and his persuasiveness as a teacher, as a lecturer and so on, he had followers that treated him almost like a guru, I would say. They would even dress like him, and I noticed some of the boys started to walk like him, to even gesture like him, even cut their hair like him. [laughter] And in some cases their work reflected this kind of mimicry. But this isn't what he was about at all. But as far as these two people are concerned, Milly Rocque and Lebrun, I felt extremely compatible with them, myself.

Teachers that I had were given a free hand. I felt at the time--it made Warshaw a kind of a poor colleague, let's say, and this brought up the differences in views. And his tendency to discredit what was going on in other classes bothered me as the director of the school,

naturally. I should say that I liked Howard. We're still friends, and we still get along, and I'm sorry to hear that he's been ill. But this kind of conflict sort of followed him along.

Howard Warshaw came to visit my classes after I had closed the school and had gone to work at Otis Art Institute and praised the work that was going on on two or three different occasions. He's an extremely sensitive man, and he has an appreciation of quality that he sees in work that doesn't necessarily conform to his own ideas. Sometimes, I recall, in his classes this kind of praise appeared inconsistent and disturbed some of his students to a great extent because somebody would come in with work that didn't follow his premises at all, and he would praise what they did. So he is not as restricted in his assessment of other things going on; it's just that somehow, when he puts on that professor's hat, he becomes dogmatic. [laughter] He did come to visit my classes and seemed to be in agreement with what was going on in my classes at Otis. Should we go on to discuss Otis Art Institute at this point?

ROGERS: Well, before we do that, just one last question. You mentioned that you had some animators from the Disney Studio in your night classes. Did you ever meet Walt Disney?

JEPSON: Oh, yes, many occasions. Walt Disney was a staunch supporter of Chouinard Art Institute, I think largely due to the fact that so many of his people throughout the years have been former students. Some of the top executives are also former students. And as he was growing, and when he was more into the animation field than his studio is at present time, great numbers of graduates would go out there and go to work for him. When I went back to Chouinard in 1958, I think on the occasion of my 50th birthday--I hadn't returned to teach there yet, but I was going to teach in summer session--Mrs. Chouinard gave a birthday party in my honor because I was returning, and Walt Disney was also there at the party. Whenever the school would have some kind of a faculty thing or something, he would often appear. And, of course, he gave all kinds of financial support to the school. He would pick up the deficit every year and finally, when he died, half of his assets went to the Chouinard Art Institute, whose name had been then changed to California Institute of the Arts. They finally eliminated the name of Chouinard entirely. Chouinard has completely disappeared from the name, in spite of the fact that it had been established over a fifty-year period. It seemed to be a foolish move, but somehow I think some of those executives that they brought in from

New York wanted to get rid of the stigma of the Chouinard name, which they viewed as old-fashioned and out-of-date at that point. And, from several points of view--and some of my own--probably it deserved to be closed down because institutions seem to develop a kind of status quo, old hands that hold onto their jobs and dominate everything that goes on. This was especially true after [Gerald] Nordland left. Now, at this point should I go back and say anything more about Disney?

I never was a personal friend of his, you know; we were just on speaking terms, and he knew of me and the Jepson Art Institute. And, of course, Rico Lebrun had worked for him for a while at the animation studio, and he knew of my association with Lebrun and things of that kind. As I said, so many of the people who were prominent in his organization were former students.

ROGERS: If you were to describe him, what would you say?

JEPSON: Well, I don't know. How would I describe him? Essentially, he was a very simple man. Look at his background: the kind of background, very simple, very honest, and at the same time, a kind of business genius in the sense that he knew what would go. My feeling was that as he became ill and lost full control of his studio, it got sweeter and sweeter and really went downhill. I

haven't too much use for any of his movies, you know; Disneyland and all that stuff seems to me to be very superficial. I don't think that too many people that have worked in that field find that it is very useful as a recommendation if they want to work in any other studios, somehow. I know several filmmakers and actors and people of that kind; their work in Disney films is a kind of kiss of death in the rest of the industry because it's kind of artsy-crafty-cutesy kind of thing.

ROGERS: In discussing your free and loose curriculum--the classrooms were open to people who came in who were not students--can you remember anybody in particular whom we might know of that participated in that?

JEPSON: You mean at the Jepson Art Institute, are we talking about that now?

ROGERS: Yes.

JEPSON: Oh, yes. Of course, most of the students were a little bit older, because the majority of our students had come to school on the GI Bill; they were veterans of World War II. But some were not. Bob Irwin was one of the younger students at the school around 1950.

Long after I had even been working with him, when he was teaching at Chouinard, we never discussed the Jepson Art Institute. I then remembered that he had won a second prize in painting at the County Museum, a competitive

exhibition opened to California artists; he won a second prize, just as a student. I only remembered him vaguely as somewhat younger than the average student that we had there. But other people, like, well, Howard Warshaw and Bill Brice and Milly Rocque--all these people went in and listened when Rico talked; they even worked in his classes. So, in a sense, they were students, too; everybody was a student. The one philosophy I always had--and I think a good many people that were working there had it--was that if teachers aren't learning more than the students, the students aren't learning anything. So it was a kind of a spirited inquiry and investigation going on and curiosity about new directions and things of that kind.

ROGERS: You mentioned to me in our initial interview that Zero Mostel had been in your school.

JEPSON: Yes, he came in, and I think he was enrolled in Howard Warshaw's classes, as I recall. All through my school years, many people in the [film] industry were people who were also interested in art--painting, and so on. And often they would come in for short periods. During the breaks or gaps in their work, they'd come there and study, so we had many, many actors and actresses who would come in and go to classes. And if you read about famous actors, you'll find that many of them are

painting on the side. Going back to the students: Fred Hammersley was a student at the school, first, and then he became a teacher at night school. He had been a student of mine at Chouinard before World War II, then he was in the service, then he came and went to school on the GI Bill for a while, and then I made him a teacher. He taught drawing, which might surprise a lot of people because he's a hard-edge abstractionist, you know. But as a student there, he never did figurative painting. Of course, Bob Irwin is a minimal artist since his earlier abstract-expressionist work. I think I mentioned John Canavier was a student there, and he's a nonfigurative sculptor. After he went to school there for four years, he became Rico Lebrun's assistant for a couple of years. Then he went back to USC and got a degree in architecture and worked as an architect for a while, and then went back to sculpture. He's now doing sculpture, and he's an associate professor of sculpture at the University of California at Northridge [California State University, Northridge]. But a lot of people expect--I mean, from the general discussion of the school, it would seem that it was completely dominated by Lebrun, that there would be a lot of followers who were working in his manner and so on, but that wasn't necessarily the case. As I said, I had as many as twelve

or fifteen teachers there at once, and I suppose over the eight and a half years of the school, I must have had at least twenty different teachers, so it was a bigger thing. It's kind of interesting. Probably a characteristic of the school is that we felt that the best teachers should be teaching first-year students instead of advanced classes, and Rico Lebrun always taught first-year drawing and painting. The advanced classes were held by people like Henry Lee McFee, and I guess Warshaw's and Bill Brice's classes would be called advanced classes.

ROGERS: Did Escobar Marisol come to your school?

JEPSON: Yes. I don't know where you heard that or how that came out because I had forgot all about it, but she had come from one of the finishing schools around town, Marymount or some such place. I think she was a South American girl; she was very quiet and she studied primarily with Warshaw and was strongly influenced by him. Those three-dimensional figures seemed to reflect a kind of same figurative thing that he was doing in his painting and drawing--highly stylized, yet realistic features. If you know, they look like enlarged clothespins with faces on them.

TAPE NUMBER: IV, SIDE TWO

JUNE 17, 1976

ROGERS: We were discussing Marisol, and you were describing her work. What about S. Macdonald-Wright? What do you remember about him?

JEPSON: Well, my acquaintance with him was when he was teaching at Chouinard. This must have been in the latter thirties sometime when he was there. He and Morgan Russell, I think, were buddies in Paris, and they had developed this thing they called synchronism. Now, whether Morgan Russell was teaching there at the same time or not, I don't remember. I remember Macdonald-Wright more than Morgan Russell. I can't recall whether Morgan Russell was actually there during the same period that I was there or whether he had been there in the period of the early thirties when I was out doing commercial work and wasn't teaching. But all I remember about Macdonald-Wright was that he was a very handsome man who was very keen about the ladies, and the only discussions we had, seemed to me, always got around to the girls in the class. The only remark I can remember hearing--I can still remember it to this day--was that that was the reason why he was teaching, was to meet new girls. [laughter] Anyway, then I remember him in

general meetings open to the public that had something to do with art. I don't know what the occasions were, but every occasion where S. Macdonald-Wright was in the audience, he would sit about halfway back in the audience--someplace in the room, auditorium, wherever we were--and he would have very loud comments to make to the speaker about what he was saying. And, in no time, in the middle of the room on the other side would be [Lorser] Feitelson, who would add another comment, and in no time the two of them would start bantering back and forth, and they would completely take over the whole show, much to the chagrin of the speaker who happened to be up on the front. They were unquestionably the most articulate, the smartest, and the most interesting people in the whole place, and they knew it. They were a couple of show-offs as young people, I would say.

ROGERS: Would they argue with each other?

JEPSON: Yes, or sometimes they might agree or just be discussing different aspects of the subject or whatever, but it didn't seem to bother them at all to take over the whole situation, the whole scene. They seemed to be very close friends at the time, and I think this grew out of both their work that they did on the WPA [Work Projects Administration] project. The project was conducted pretty much in the same manner, I would say, to

the kind of tongue-in-cheek thing where, in any case, the good jobs were given to a lot of their favorite girlfriends, who got the best jobs designing murals, and the other people working on the projects became flunkies, for the most part.

ROGERS: Are these the murals at Santa Monica City Hall and Public Library?

JEPSON: I think so, I don't know. I can't recall exactly. I think there is some at Los Angeles City Hall and maybe Santa Monica. And it might be a biased view. I gathered from some of the people who were on the project that I knew that there wasn't a chance that they could do anything of their own there; they had to be assistants to some of Macdonald-Wright's or Feitelson's girlfriends. [laughter] Anyway, that's about all I know about it.

My first acquaintance with Feitelson was as a teacher at Chouinard when I was still a student there. He taught a class which was held in the rear studio on Eighth Street. When the school started in the early twenties, it started up on Eighth Street, and that's where I went to school. It was an old house in the front, and they had built a large studio in back of the house, and beyond that was a second house, a small house, and they used the front room of that, made it into a studio.

Feitelson was teaching class there, and I looked into that class a couple of times. There again, somehow, the only thing I can recall about him was his interest in the female members of the class. [laughter] He was a great girl-chaser in those days.

ROGERS: After your own school closed, what happened to the students that were in your school?

JEPSON: Well, those who still had GI Bill time to go, for the most part, went to other schools. I think the majority of them went to the Otis Art Institute, because they still had GI time. By transferring and not interrupting their training by going right to another school in the next semester, they could continue. And a great number of them--it may have been twenty-five or so--went to Otis. Some of the students decided to get together, and they rented a big building in back of a big commercial building with a garagelike space that they rented jointly as a cooperative effort. And in order to get money to support this idea--because it takes money even to set up a studio and to keep paying the rent and so on--they held an auction of their work, and Karl With, who was an art history professor at UCLA and who had lectured at my school many times, worked as the auctioneer. It was extremely successful; he was a good salesman, excellent auctioneer, and raised quite a bit

of money for them to work. But that didn't seem to carry on very long. It would seem to me that it went on for a short time after; I really can't recall exactly how long it continued. But that was, oh, eight or ten of those students that were sort of compatible. And they were some of the stars of the place, I suppose.

ROGERS: Can you remember who any of them were?

JEPSON: I remember some of them, but as far as I can recall, none of that group of eight or ten people seemed to have carried on and done very much since.

[William R.] Ptaszynski was one. He's teaching art at the University of California at Santa Barbara.

He was married for a long time to one of those girls that went over there with him. But it would seem to me that most of those people, one of the ones that carried on, went on with their work, went into commercial work of some kind.

ROGERS: Did they auction their own works off that day?

JEPSON: Yes, that's what it was. They were auctioning their own paintings and drawings. And there were some good ones you know; they were a competent group.

ROGERS: Did you go to the auction?

JEPSON: No, I didn't. I didn't see the auction.

ROGERS: And what about yourself after the school closed? What happened then?

JEPSON: Well, I was on the board of directors at the Kahn Art Institute. It was on Melrose [Avenue], and I taught one class there in the spring of 1953. It went one or two nights a week is all. And that was a kind of interesting experience because [Edward] Kienholz was around there at the time. Kienholz, of course, became very famous. He wasn't enrolled; he used to come in there because he was interested in one of the girls at the time. But that's about all I remember about him. That school closed not too long after that.

ROGERS: Who organized that school?

JEPSON: Frederick Kahn. I had known him since he taught advertising at Chouinard in the thirties. I became reacquainted with him when I was treasurer of the California Association of Private Schools. I joined the California Association of Private Schools. They wanted me as treasurer because I had a good bookkeeper and a good accountant, I guess. I made them do all the work; as treasurer I didn't do anything, really. It seems to me there was some kind of a meeting. We had meetings of the private schools about their dealings with the government and the Veterans Administration and the problems related to that. And there was a big meeting of all the schools up in San Francisco, and I became reacquainted with Kahn there. I knew him before

World War II started as a teacher at Chouinard at some time; he was a commercial artist who had contact with an agent who handled my commercial work that I was doing, designing and so on all during the war. In addition to working as a senior tool designer in the tool engineering department at Lockheed, I did jobs for him on the side. They were all very easy for me to do, and none of them too difficult, so I was designing plumbing fixtures and I don't know what all. I designed different products; then I did some murals, of all things, for a yacht that I never did see. You know, I did the work, and he took it and hung it. It was up in San Francisco harbor someplace. In fact, I did a mural for a church for him, too. It was painted on canvas, so he just took it up there and mounted it, so I don't even know what church it was. I never bothered to sign it because, I assure you, it was a very eclectic kind of quick commercial job, you know. I was always sure that he was submitting it as his own work.

In any case, I remember that Kahn had introduced me to this fellow by the name of Pierre Lafitte, who was a great-grandson of the pirate Jean Lafitte--or great-great-grandson, probably. But, anyway, he was a very interesting man. He himself had been a fashion illustrator in Paris before he came out here. I was doing

these jobs for him off and on for six months or a year, and I happened to meet Kahn, who said, "Well, do you know he's a test pilot?" So the next time I met him I said, "I hear that you're a test pilot for Northrop Aircraft Corporation." He said, "Oh, yeah, I try them out." I discovered that he earlier had been a pilot in the French air force. A very unusual man. The last I ever heard of him, he was involved in some kind of a thing where he had broken up a dope ring for the CIA or the FBI. He's a kind of a man [who] got himself into all kinds of scrapes--a wheeler-dealer, I guess.

ROGERS: I'm interested in this California Association of Private Schools and your problems with the VA. Would you like to elaborate on that in any way?

JEPSON: Well, see, we were accredited by the Veterans Administration, and all the schools were also accredited by the state of California. They had investigators come around, and they would see how you kept records and whether or not you were following the courses of study that you had outlined, that you had submitted, that you claimed that you were teaching and so on. And then the state approved for you the Veterans Administration; this had to come before you could get veterans approval. And they had their own regulations and rules and ways of working. As you can imagine, being in a bureaucracy,

how technical that was, and I think most people, without exception, had great difficulty going through that maze of regulations, in spite of the fact that they were directing the whole show, too. When the contracts were given and so on, they wrote the contracts; you submitted catalogs and résumés of courses and things of that kind, but the actual contract was very restrictive and very highly formalized and extremely varied according to different conditions. For example, people who had their own school stores within their schools--who supplied the students directly from the school to the student--had an entirely different kind of arrangement from those who didn't. I didn't have a store in the Jepson Art Institute. I merely gave a letter of credit to students who went to the local art stores like Ted Gibson's and Flax's, and I think there were a couple others. Then we billed the Veterans Administration. The only way I can describe this [is] as a rather difficult and complex thing because there seemed to be different regulations for students under different bills. Students going under the bill for rehabilitation--veterans who had a disability discharge for whatever reason--would have a different kind of billing and so on. And we'd have different people coming around to investigate every detail of all these different students.

But in my own case, I had nine different contracts which said, for example, that I should charge supplies to students "at the same rate charged to all other students," and that was the way it was written. They wrote the contract. In many cases I didn't sign the contracts, really; I was always arguing with them. It was part of my contrariness, I guess, but in a sense, I was always on an interim agreement of some kind. They went on anyway, even though I didn't sign them. But actually, I had about four new contracts a year that we were supposed to sign. But Frances Berkey that I mentioned before had gotten into an argument with a Veterans Administration representative. She was a little short-tempered and harassed to a considerable extent because I used to pile all the work on her. In any case, he blamed her for some difficulty he was having with some technical matter related to his job in relation with what he was doing with our school, which he blamed on her. And she thought it was unfair, so she just gave him holy hell. Well, that was a big mistake as far as we were concerned because it wasn't very long before he brought in the government auditors. I had the whole thing come right down on me. I had kept every record that I ever had. When a General Accounting Office came in there and they started looking for every nickel and dime, I

ended up owing them money. They claimed that the contract was in error and that regulations say that "the government is not responsible for the action of its agents." A lot of people don't know that. The agents had written the contract, the agents had signed the contracts, but the government is not responsible for the action of its agents! And there was an old regulation that none of the Veterans Administration's agents were aware of, written long before World War II, which said that materials that were handled in the way I handled them had to be "furnished at cost" to me. This is typical; it's not uncommon at all. It was a minor thing in my case. I think it amounted to \$3,500 or something like that, \$3,500, which wasn't very much, because I think USC ended up owing them about \$5 million. I think it was very common.

The government not only doesn't hold to its own contracts, but it can renegotiate contracts. They wanted to renegotiate my old contracts, even up to the time that I closed. In fact, that was one of the things that made me want to close. I told them, "Look, I'm not going to renegotiate any of these five-year-old contracts. You're not going to get me into that kind of a stink." They wanted to go back and renegotiate contracts that they had made mistakes on, and not long afterwards I decided

to quit. Anybody that deals with the government can tell you that this is a very typical kind of thing, and it's expensive to fight because you have to hire lawyers and so on. And we had hearings about it out here, and I hired the best lawyer I could get, and the examiner ruled in my favor. Then it went back to Washington, and three other examiners reviewed it, and they ruled against me. And about that time I quit. I mean, that was enough! [laughter] It wasn't a very important issue, really. I was ready to close the school, anyway.

ROGERS: How long were you with the Kahn school?

JEPSON: Oh, I taught there in the spring semester of 1953, that's all, I think. It may have also been in the fall; I can't remember.

ROGERS: And then?

JEPSON: Well, then Millard Sheets asked me to head the drawing department at the Otis Art Institute. Three of us were recommended as possible directors of this school, and I applied for that job along with Kenneth Ross, who's the Municipal Art Department director for the city of Los Angeles now. I guess Millard Sheets must have been the other one because he's the one that got the job. He wrote the requirements, and he was the only one they fitted, they said. [laughter] Anyway, he asked me to come and teach, which satisfied me because

his position looked to me like an impossible job, and I think he did a remarkable thing in getting the [L.A. County] Board of Supervisors to come around to support the funding of the new buildings of the plant and getting rid of a couple of the old buildings that were there. And he brought in some new people that were very exciting--one of them, in particular, Peter Voulkos. (I don't know whether I mentioned him before or not.) Then I taught there for four and a half school years. I started in February '54 and finished in June '58.

There were some very interesting students who came out of that. Kenneth Price, who is very prominent in the ceramic field throughout the United States, was there; he had been a student of mine before that at USC when I took over Francis de Erdely's night classes, and Kenneth Price was a student in my class there at that time. I guess he must have gotten his degree at USC before he went to Otis and studied with Pete Voulkos; he wasn't a student of mine at Otis. (How about some coffee?)

It seems to me that Pete Voulkos was the one whose influence seemed to have the most impact on the community of any other teacher there at the time. I say this not only because students of his--like Ken Price, Billy Al Bengston, John Mason--all went on to make names for themselves, but because the impact of his influence on the

medium seemed to pull it out of the kind of artsy-crafty little ceramic oven-in-the-kitchen kind of work that was going on in California for the most part. It wasn't a medium that I had any interest in whatsoever up to the time I met Pete at Otis. Pete as a person is a delightful, very dynamic man. He's a very quiet, very down-to-earth kind of person, without pretense. As a human being, he doesn't seem to need to dominate those around him, and yet he does, just by the strength of his personality. Actually, he has a very relaxed "Aw, shucks" attitude towards most everything and toward people, and his comments about students and their work all seem to be very off-hand; and this disturbed some students who were primarily interested in the technical side of ceramics. He had no interest whatever in all those fancy multicolored glazes, and he was inclined to let people go their own way pretty much, without anything other than a suggestion here or there. At the same time, he was off and working on his own stuff. He did work of his own in his classes all the time, and he was a fantastically energetic worker in the sense that it never seemed to occur to him that he should stop. He'd work on into the night. And this was sort of a sore point in the school because the janitors wanted to get in there to clean things up. He managed to finally convince the

administration that they should be kept out of the ceramic department. So they let the place become a mess, and they [the students] got to go on with the job. When he first arrived, they had no ceramic building. The ceramic kiln was outdoors, and the students did an incredible amount of work with very little equipment and, as I say, soon began to break away from the cute ornamental cup-and-saucer tradition that most ceramic classes follow. One of the most significant artistic movements in the United States evolved or developed from Voulkos's classes at Otis.

We have two of Billy Bengston's ceramics that he did during that period. Mrs. Jepson has always kept those around. I had visited the place he called his studio, a little kind of hole in the wall someplace in an upstairs apartment of some kind, during that period. He was always a very dynamic, a very lively person, but something of a rebel and sort of against the government of the school. Bengston's last works in the school were garishly painted ceramics on which he had placed a large sign, "Color by Fuller Paint Company," to bug Millard Sheets. And I don't know whether Millard Sheets kicked him out or whether he just quit on his own from the school; he didn't complete any kind of course of study there, as I recall. And like a lot of students, I think he probably

looks back on that as the smartest move he ever made, to quit being a student--which is always a very high point for art students. One of my points of view towards education is that school is there to teach people to educate themselves. When they get to the point where they are self-motivated and think they don't need school anymore--they don't want any part of it, let's say; they want to do their own thing--the school has served that function. Even though they look back on it and say, "Well, that was a lot of bullshit," it has served that important purpose because, after all, Billy Bengston was a pretty young fellow when he went to school there, and he needed that period to mature a little. Now, I'm sure that as far as Pete Voulkos is concerned, I don't think anybody looks back on their association with him and feels that it wasn't a great advantage to have known and worked with him--and probably a turning point in their lives. Offhand, I can remember some of the people that were students at Otis. Some students of mine are now my close friends, but most of them have gone into teaching or commercial fields and are not dominantly in fine arts at this point.

The only one of importance, in addition to those who studied with Voulkos (and I think of great importance, as far as I'm concerned, to the community of art, not only

the United States but throughout the world), is John Baldassari. He was a student there for a year while on leave from teaching in a San Diego college. He's a kind of spokesman, I would say, for a whole new group of people who are coming along who are primarily interested in kind of concept art at this point, but as a nonlinear thinker. As a person, he seems to be probably one of the more important people that came out of my classes at Otis. He has remarked to me fairly recently that he didn't like What did he say? He didn't like what I taught; what he liked was the way I taught it. Which is good--I thought that was a great compliment, and that's exactly what I'd like him to say. In any case, I think he's extremely important. I think in that article that was published about me [LAICA Journal] I mentioned that I found him "entertaining." Well, maybe that sounds like slander. I do enjoy him, and he writes parables that I find most enjoyable. It's full of paradox and irony and metaphors that are remarkable. He's quite a person. And it's that that turns me on more than anything else he does; it's what he says in his own enigmatic way. He's very active in the art community, both for his own work and as a teacher at California Institute of the Arts. I see him every time I go to an art lecture of any kind. Baldassari is always there;

he's always listening. He doesn't say much; he doesn't participate; he just seems to go. So he's an artist who is very much in the center of the art world in Southern California right now that has become known all over the art world. From my own point of view, he and Bob Irwin have, as teachers, had the greatest impact on the Southern California art scene.

Being in an art school seemed to be a crossroads of the art world at large, sooner or later, for one reason or another, because when artists come to town they either lecture here or they teach, so the art school seems to serve that kind of function in the society and is probably important for that reason alone. The university systems have tried to take over this kind of thing, and they can manage it to the extent that they can pay for artists to come and lecture, but it always seems to be lost in that vast community. I know that there are university programs where contemporary artists are lecturing every week. Well, maybe it does have an impact, I don't know. I don't know what the impact would be. Except for an occasional attendance, I'm out of that world right now. I go over to those talks at UCLA once in a while myself, but what it means in the community I wouldn't be able to say.

ROGERS: Was Peter Voulkos the only one who was approaching

ceramics with these new concepts at that time?

JEPSON: As far as I'm concerned he was the first contemporary artist to make it into a fine art. I would say that. As you probably know, Pete Voulkos, for many years, probably won every first prize at every ceramic show, even in the more conventional traditional type of ceramic--really a master. I think why Millard Sheets brought him in was on the basis of the more traditional work that he had done. He was somewhat surprised and a little chagrined to find him so far out in his approach to education. Sheets's idea was that that department would be an applied art department; they would develop students who'd work with some big commercial pottery company of some kind.

ROGERS: What kind of a transition does an artist have to make when he shifts from drawing and oil painting to ceramics?

JEPSON: Well, every medium has its own limitations and possibilities that are quite distinct from any other. For instance, when you're building something out of clay, if you're building it on a central core of some kind, that's one kind of thing. Putting on clay becomes a different kind of activity that modifies the response of the material. Ceramics, being essentially pottery, these things are usually hollow; they're working from

both inside and outside at the same time whether they turn it on a wheel or whether they're forming it by hand. And this experience involves a different kind of awareness and sensitivity of its significance. This act of doing that is very stimulating and quite different from working with any other medium; it's a kind of primal thing all of its own that goes back to our organic roots. I think the great difficulty and real problem that seemed to plague the field before Pete came along was that they looked upon it as pottery decoration, in which the glazing and ornamentation of pots didn't have a kind of total sculptural feeling that Pete managed to bring into this world. Consequently, his kind of free-wheeling approach, the primary freshness of everything he did, and the elemental power of it was overwhelming as far as the art community was concerned. And he seems to me to have been one of the real forces in the community for the kind of changes that have taken place. I think that it hasn't been extended as much as it might have, although he continues to teach. He teaches up at Berkeley, the University of California. Pete has never been a kind of routine teacher. He lets people work by themselves; he's inclined to let his assistants take over and do the job because he's always doing something on his own. And he's not overly articulate, although he can certainly talk, and

when he has something to say it really has an impact. I think he gave a kind of glimpse of great future possibilities for the medium. Rose Slivka, the editor of Craft Horizons, recently told me that she is writing a book on Pete Voulkos which will be published to coincide with the opening of his one-man retrospective to be held in San Francisco in the spring of 1977.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE ONE

JUNE 24, 1976

ROGERS: Before we go on with our interview, Mr. Jepson, is there anything more that you've thought of in this period since we've been together that you would like to say about your own school and your years there?

JEPSON: Yes, there are several facts that I think should be included, not the least of which is the fact that I met my present wife, Marcia Shlaudeman, as a student there, and we were married in 1951. Our first child, Stephen Jepson, was born in 1954. I'd like to emphasize that because as an artist she always used her maiden name. And even as a student, she entered a national competition for drawings. One of her drawings was accepted in an exhibition that, I think, was held in a museum in the Midwest somewhere--Denver or someplace like that; I can't recall exactly. When we were married in 1951, Rico Lebrun was best man at our wedding. We always remained good friends, up until the time he died. I recently ran onto a letter that I received from him asking me about getting him a studio in west Los Angeles very close to here, because he was coming back from Mexico; he had just spent two years in Mexico at that time. I think I should go back to my wife's work in the field of art; she was extremely

successful having her work accepted in competitions. At that time, there seemed to be a lot more competitions opened for artists than there are at the present time. Maybe it's because both of us have sort of gotten out of that world, and we're not particularly aware of it, or she isn't particularly interested in submitting work (although she continues to draw); but for quite a long period of time she was regularly accepted in exhibitions of both paintings and drawings throughout the United States and had her work shown in over twenty-five museums and galleries. And she received a purchase award; one of her drawings is in the permanent collection in the gallery at Long Beach. One of the things that pleased her most at this point was that her work was accepted by people who she didn't know, didn't know her or know that she had any connection with me and so on. And these times when she was accepted outside Southern California were the ones that seemed to satisfy her the most. She showed many times in the San Francisco Museum and in Eastern museums, in particular. In recent years, she found that as our two children grew older-- we now have two: Elena Jepson is sixteen years old; she is going to school here--it took more time, rather than less time as she expected. Many people expect that when children start to grow up that they won't take as

much of the time. It seemed to work the other way for her. So in recent years, she hasn't been as active. She, like I did, gave up her studio when we made a trip to England and decided to stay there for an unspecified time. This was, oh, three years ago, and neither of us has managed to set up a studio to work in since because we still have this vision that we might take off and go back to England or someplace.

Now, you asked some question about Rico's lectures. I think you were talking about his attitude.

ROGERS: Yes, you had alluded several times to the fact that Rico Lebrun was misunderstood and that you felt he had a great deal of theory to offer that hasn't been exposed as much as his controversial Crucifixion and the other work that he has done and that you wanted to elaborate some more on that.

JEPSON: Yes, well, you read a quote of Rico Lebrun's from Howard Warshaw's tapes, and it brought me back to something that was very much on our minds, I think, at that point. I think that, for instance, Howard might feel that he was reflecting something that went on at that time in the school in regard to Lebrun's lectures. For example, it would seem to me that that quote was very close to the kind of general lecture that Lebrun might have given to his classes at that time. As you know,

Howard Warshaw and Bill Brice and Milly Rocque and some of the other teachers all attended his classes and actually worked in the classes very much as if they were students of his at that point, and to hear Howard repeat the same thing reminds me of something that I have always felt: that it is possible to reduce everything to a kind of formal system if you're determined to do so. His comment about change and about different points of view prior to a cubist point of view--it would seem that this comes back to the formal descriptions that were very much in evidence during those years. Cubism became an academic formula, a kind of system that pervaded the entire educational establishment, and this idea [of] reducing it to a fixed verbal analysis and system resulted in a how-to-do-it program that resulted in a mere demonstration of the formal premises established in what certain people saw in the work of cubism.

In proceeding to follow the idea of change and difference as essential feature of life, this actually seems to freeze it in time, into a kind of attitude and point of view that really doesn't adhere to the notion that things are different and things are changing all the time, and no two things are alike, that life is continually in a state of flux, and this seems to me to be: as soon as anything becomes consistent, anytime

it's reduced to a kind of formal analysis, it denies that basic fact of life. And I noticed in quoting what I read here about Lebrun's lectures, in a sense, this is what he's talking about here. He says, "What do you believe? Is your life permanent? Are you cognizant of your own death? Are you aware of yourself as something in constant transition? Are you willing to accept that you're not a permanent personality, and every day is a change? Things are different every day, and so are we." It seems that this is something that very much needs to be said; it's something that we talked about time and time again.

One of the things that, I think, was more or less crystallized in an idea of what art education could be, or what it might be, grew out of a lot of things that were going on in other fields at the time. Locally, there were some people who were writing about life processes, about change, for instance, about such things as a philosophy of science. I remember one book by Hans Reichenbach called The Rise of Scientific Philosophy. And then the other book that seemed to have a lot of influence on us--by a local author--was called Science and Sanity. And we used to have a lot of fun sort of kicking that title around. It seems a lot of times that many of the things that we did, we poked our noses into books. By thinking about the idea of such things as

change and difference and how the world's in a continuous state of flux and so on, I think that we were very much in agreement with the idea that the question wasn't how can we change, but why do we behave as if we weren't changing all the time? Why do we perform as if we were the same? And what do we do to ourselves, how do we use ourselves in our daily practices in such a way as to condition us to automatically behave in a rigid stereotype way? One thing that we discussed at the school quite a bit was the fact that, in most cases, we had spent our lives on the notion that practice somehow makes perfect, that if you practiced enough, practiced this skill, this facility, you develop the means that would enable you to reveal your own uniqueness. And when you start to make an effort to break these rigid performances, whether it's verbal, on paper or whatever, it is extremely difficult, and we don't realize that we're bound in so many ways by these preconceptions and stereotyped conditions, automatic responses. You don't realize that these mannerisms exist until we try to break them, then the effort to break conditional behavior becomes a source of great irritation and strain itself.

And from this whole idea, which I think is central to this whole theme Somehow, whenever I think about art education, whenever I talk about it, I always

seem to come back to central questions having to do with what is unnatural. There was a book called The Natural Way to Draw; it came out about 1930. It was very much in evidence around and often appeared in classrooms. In thinking about the natural way to draw I've come to realize myself that even when you formalize any activity and say, "This is the natural way to do it," that there might be accompanying that approach certain preconceptions about its value and how to go about it that would, in itself, become a rigid stereotyped way of doing things. This has proven to be so. That book became a kind of standard for drawing teachers throughout the country. And it's incredible how much alike the work produced adheres to that system that was set up by this man.

All this seems to come back to the same thing that I said before. Why are we so rigid? Why is it that we behave as if there was no change? It would seem to be, somehow, by the way we're conditioned in education, that the system itself is set up to deny change and deny the existence of any real difference. Conformity to the formal system, to a kind of programming They use the term programming now in a kind of mechanistic attitude toward thought. This kind of thing would seem to equate mental activity to a machine rather than to a

growing evolving process which characterizes all living things, as far as that's concerned. Man isn't like a machine. The mind, the brain, the body, central nervous system, is under some degree of subconscious control that is affected by the willful attention of the learner, something which grows, changes and develops. But machines don't grow; they can change by wearing out, but they don't grow. The behaviorist idea that uniqueness is a kind of random accident or accidental mix of factors which have been programmed into the brain by conditioning seems to deny the existence of a dynamic, spontaneous, changing process. I think that implementation of this mechanistic theory of man sets up habits and modes of thought which separate thought from feeling and energy-generating action and finally produce anxiety. As far as I'm concerned, nerve-energy deprivation is the cause of most neurotic behavior. It stems from failure to allow for a natural growth and maintenance of the whole psychophysiological system.

The efforts to produce changes and differences too often seem to call for the kind of redoubling of the same kind of effort that caused the rigidities, fixed attitudes, and modes of thought that people have gotten into. At one time during the nineteenth century, there was a German doctor, Samuel Hahnemann, who devised a

homeopathic medical theory or cure for ailments which was called "Like cures like." In other words, if you were poisoned by something, something was upsetting your system, the induction of more of the same would cure you of this problem or this trouble. It's amazing that this was accepted quite readily by a lot of physicians at the time, and it wasn't till the latter part of the nineteenth century that it was thoroughly discredited in most circles, except in the field of psychiatry and psychoanalysis. The dominance of formal systems and categories which reduces things to fixed verbal terms is a passive detached way of understanding behavior and the world around you by logical and rational means. This detached system may be a cause of the trouble [and] the attempt to cure resulting emotional problems has been through the use of the same system of verbal analysis. Most of the psychological studies of verbal behavior come back to the idea that the emotional imbalance accompanied by rigidities in speech and behaviors are maladjustments which are due in some way to a misevaluation of events, a kind of inability to adapt verbalization to reality. So the verbal symptoms which are a secondary result of retardation in development of the nervous system are used as a basis for the efforts to create a "like-cures-like" verbal cure, so it seems to me. Can we stop a minute?

[tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: If an artist is to be completely free to change, at what point does he no longer need formal training?

Or did he ever need it in the beginning?

JEPSON: Well, formal training is a term which implies formalization. I think that as long as education is inclusive of the whole being, as long as the awareness and the attention that's given to the changing nature of the experiences in learning, regardless of what is being studied or what the occasion, then it becomes a part of a holistic kind of evolving growth process, which is modifiable under the direct or indirect control of willful attention and gut awareness of the learner. This is the thing that produces the energy that creates the substances which develop and maintain the nerve cells in the brain. So the question is what kind of education is of value? Initially the task is to begin with the importance of what the student already tacitly knows. The capacity to understand and to build on this potential for creative growth is like the capacity to love. It's already there! It would seem that no particular kind of knowledge or information is essential as a prerequisite, because we find throughout history that people have had different attitudes, modes of thought, and beliefs, different kinds of backgrounds, and different kinds of

formal training and so on. The only factor that seems to be common to all of the more creative people throughout history--and this includes people like [Albert] Einstein, whom I feel they haven't paid enough attention to in terms of what he said about innovative thought in science, for example, and the fact that he advised scientists to think like poets (a lot of things that he was discussing are generally sort of cast aside as a kind of a smart crack by a funny old man)--it comes down to how inclusive the learning process is. Most learning, as I see it, the kind of programs that we have in most schools, are exclusive, skills which exclude the person's subjective awareness of his own experiences in the process of learning. The idea of objective detachment as a virtue as a dominant mode of behavior is a fragmenting process which I think is destructive and can, through a synthesis of clinical and experimental evidence, be convincingly proven to be so. I think many people have said this: universities worship at the altar of rationality, and this kind of irrational adherence to rational, linear, convergent thought excludes so much of what's going on within the individual and has very little to do with the development or use of organic roots of the whole brain.

I have a lot of things to say about this. It would seem to me that emphasis on the breakdown of subject matter

is an exclusive, roundabout, spectator-oriented way of learning about things. And this, I think, characterizes modern society's approach to art. In Southern California--or anyplace else--I've felt that the museums are dominated by a kind of modern merchandising approach to art. Even our County Museum reminds me of those shopping centers; there's something of that character in it. And I don't think it's quite by accident that many museum people seem to be very much like public relations people who are about to popularize or sell a certain kind of work. What's up front seems to count most in the society; consequently, they're trying to spend more for the installation and show fewer and fewer things than they spend on contemporary art. I don't know what the remedy might be, but I've noticed a great difference--having traveled around the United States and in Europe--from those old museums, which of course have character. It may have something to do with the fact that the buildings are old and kind of run-down. The outside of the Victoria and Albert Museum has all kinds of shrapnel marks on the sides of the walls from bombs and so. There's a kind of quality there that is essentially terribly different from anything that goes on here, particularly out here in California.

ROGERS: Is it more than just being old?

JEPSON: I think so. Of course, they have the advantage of the fact that they have larger collections, more extensive collections. I don't know what it is. It would be hard for me to really pinpoint it. I have had some contact with museum people in the past. For instance, I knew Dr. [William] Valentiner very well when he was director here, and Jimmy Byrnes. My first run-in with him [Byrnes], really, had to do with one of the shows they had at the County Museum (this was in the old building, the one in Exposition Park). They had a big exhibition of the paintings by Rembrandt and Rubens together--a tremendous exhibition--and none of the teachers on the staff in my school were particularly concerned with involving students in the study of those masters. So I got a painter who had been teaching at Otis at the time who I knew was a devotee of Rembrandt and Rubens; they were like his gods. I thought, "Well, he would be the man to usher the students around this exhibition." So I got him. I called him on the phone. I never met the man, although he was a prominent portrait painter here in town. He finally ended up marrying some movie star. Somebody might know from these clues who he was, but I can't think of his name. I called him up, and he said, well, he would like to do that, if he could have the students make some studies from the paintings

as he had done as a student in Europe. So I made a telephone call to Jimmy Byrnes, who was in charge of the exhibition, to try and get permission to bring the painting class students to the show, two or three times during the period the show was to be on. And I ran up against a good deal of opposition from Jimmy Byrnes because he obviously was antagonistic towards art students and artists who might want to do such a thing in "his" museum. He made a thing about how students are inclined to point, and they might scratch the paintings--and they might at that. [laughter]

And his objection confirmed a lot of the feelings I had about museum directors and curators. After that time, I became well acquainted with Jimmy Byrnes because he was a close friend of Bill Brice's, who was one of my teachers, and I went to several dinner parties in Bill Brice's home in which Jimmy Byrnes was there. I still have the feeling that even though some of them are very keen about bringing contemporary art into the museum, they're not too keen about the artists themselves, because generally these people live and think on an entirely different level. Their lives are directed toward the end product and not toward the creative process itself, and the kind of people who are artists aren't into the political kind of world which those people are involved in.

I was a rather close friend of Donald Bear, who was the director of the museum at Santa Barbara, spent two or three weekends up there with him in his home with him and his wife, Esther, who now runs a gallery in Santa Barbara. And on one occasion, when there was a meeting in his home of the Western Association of Museum Directors, Rico Lebrun was with me, and the discussions going on between the men were extremely lively. But I have to say that what they had to talk about and what they had to say had very little to do with anything that would interest either Rico Lebrun or myself. And I felt that they felt the same way about us. They have no interest whatever in what we might have to say in this world of theirs.

So the gallery directors, the gallery operators, and the museum directors--they were really, in a sense, merchandisers of products of popular artists. There may be some that are in tune with artists, but in general this is a different world entirely. The focus of their lives is on the works and actions of others. They make what they consider to be an in-depth study of the works and the actions of others in the past. But they remain unattached, uninvolved with this kind of world. And it's become more so in current times. I talked to Valentiner about this quite at length. Students, scholars--especially art scholars--have very little to do with actually doing

any art work themselves. Sometimes they may take a few courses and so on. Before the introduction of office copiers and so on, of course, they had cameras, which many of them used. I think Dr. [Karl] With told me that he got his PhD on work he did with the camera photographing art works. But, up until the last fifty years or so, I guess, one of the things that art scholars had to do was to learn to sketch and to draw and to make notebooks of drawings, and they did a great deal of that. So they, at least, had that kind of involvement with the things that were the subject matter of their study. So in a sense, at that point, [it] was more of an active mode of learning, whereas it seems to become more and more detached as more and more reproductions, photographs, and things of that kind are available.

And I've noticed this change in myself. I, from time to time, have done a great deal of research on things related to my own collection--seventeenth-century sculptures in particular, and things of that kind. I found that [change] in the time spent in the library. Because I developed this skill of descriptive drawing, I could draw things that I saw quite precisely, very easily, and very quickly; my notebooks that I used in relation to this, up until about five years ago, are just full of drawings that I made of things that I was studying. I would make a note of what it

was and where it was and where to find it and so on--the usual kind of thing. But I would also make a sketch to remind me what it was, which helped a great deal in remembering what the whole thing was all about. It has since become so easy to get photocopies. This is one thing I found in the Victoria and Albert Museum; it's very easy and very inexpensive to get excellent copies of pages on books, and they did it very efficiently, very quickly, without any fuss or anything. In a long run, I think, if you're going to continue in that kind of vein, it's probably much more useful for continuing research than the drawings would have been. Yet it seems to me to be essential in learning processes to somehow actively identify with the thing studied to really get some kind of active response from what you're studying. And the active mode seems to be essential to a kind of inclusive way of learning and growing which I think is important. The growth model seems to fit the need much more than the idea that is somehow presented by the behaviorist school of learning.

TAPE NUMBER: V, SIDE TWO

JUNE 24, 1976

ROGERS: How do you view the role of a museum in the field of art education?

JEPSON: Well, it seems that its value to the community has a lot to do with the way the culture of the community develops. It would seem to me that in a society where the entire community with all its cultural ties with the past is like a museum--in the case of some European cities--that there isn't such a separation; there isn't such a gap between what you find inside and what you find outside. And this, of course, I think makes the museum at least something that might be more accepted by the community as a whole. However, this isn't necessarily so. When attitudes and modes of thought change, a certain amount of dissatisfaction with the past seems to always develop in different times within communities, probably because the work is associated with some other kinds of authoritarian oppression. It's not uncommon even for artists who are raised right amongst these things--and I have known a few European-born artists in addition to Lebrun who told me that they weren't particularly impressed with places like the Vatican and so on.

I remember Rico Lebrun telling me one time that his

father or one of his relatives was working on a scaffold in the Vatican, doing some kind of repair or something. In any case, there was somebody who allowed him (as a young man) to go climb up there so that he could get a close look at Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling. I said, "What impressed you the most?" He said, "The thing that impressed me most was the size of the cracks." [laughter] So in any case, it's very hard to say how much this means to the community, whether it's of value or whether it isn't.

It seems to have something to do with the total social and cultural development of the society. It seems that the Russians' love of poetry, which permeated every strata of society prior to the revolution, had a lot to do with the fact that they developed such great writers--possibly had something to do with it, I don't know. In any case, the support of museums, because of the nature of the society we have here, is often, for the most part, looked upon by many as an unnecessary expenditure of public funds. Consequently, we don't see tremendous public support. They're always trying to cut back, and museums are pinched by budgets and so on; and the idea that they [recently] decided to close the educational department in the [County] Museum is symptomatic of a kind thing going on in general within the city of Los Angeles.

When I entered art school here, there were quite a few art schools in the city which closed and folded afterwards, but at the present time, the only art school of any size at all is the Otis Art Institute. There is only one that exists in the central city, and it only accommodates 150, 200 students, something like that, whereas the Chouinard art school, I think from the time of its inception, had many more students than that, probably averaged 450, 500 students at all times just within that one school. Public support of art schools isn't necessarily a guarantee of any great art movement coming out of it; however, it's interesting to see how much more money is spent on art schools in places like London and all the large cities of England. Those art schools are closely allied with applied technology, and many might view them as sort of glorified trade schools, but nevertheless, they still have some very good public art schools in their large cities. And the fact that they are supported by public money and that most of the students are there on scholarships (because they don't have much money) says something that sets us aside from the rest of the world.

However, in the art world there has been a kind of revolution going on and a kind of rejection of the authority of the past, which is associated with museums

and things of that kind, and this is paralleled on other levels of study also--and with a good deal of justification. There is a tendency to feel that lot of the activity has been a kind of meaningless oppression of the individual's own potential, that it has been used as a kind of lever against the development of the person's own uniqueness and growth, let's say. It seems to me that the concepts that are now dominating the whole art scene are essentially very much like the whole academic world in the sense that in order to understand the work you must read about it first--the idea of a kind of analytical preconception and understanding being necessary in order to appreciate what is going on, or that what the artist says and what his concepts are is more important than the work itself. [This idea] has some kind of significance and may eventually change into something very different as a reaction. At this point it's in such a state of flux, it's hard to assess it, but it's characteristic of the kind of revolution that is going on. If I see students--as I have in the past--decide to reject the whole business, the whole darn thing, and throw it out and say, "It's all a lot of bullshit," maybe their protestations reflect a move in the right direction. I can't see them as oracles or as philosophers, however, probably because I'm always reminded of the old Oriental

saying, "The art of which I speak is not the art; it's something else." [laughter]

But I find some very strange things happening in which art critics and art historians are starting to teach laboratory classes in art studios even though they are not and never have been actively involved themselves. Many of us who taught were involved in rather mundane applications of whatever skills we had just to survive and make money. And whatever idealism we had about the whole art world and education and so on, we sort of hoped to bring that into the classroom. But certainly teachers who had never performed, or never actively participated, or couldn't at least demonstrate some part of what they were saying were always rejected as studio teachers in art schools. And yet, those very descriptions, those diagrams and those maps and how-to-do-it classroom demonstrations were as insidious as not having any at all, so I'm rather skeptical and confused about the directions the whole thing is taking; and where it will lead us, I don't know. I do feel this: that whatever goes on in a museum, whatever it is, it's a reflection of the total community. It is not set; despite the kind of ivory-tower atmosphere, it's not immune from the whole trend of the society in which we live. It's somehow affected by it, and its meaning, its significance,

is determined by a kind of education and development or deterioration that goes on within the society itself.

Many historians now predict that our whole society may soon come to a grinding halt. [tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: Do you believe or feel that the museums in California accurately reflect the level of activity here?

JEPSON: No, I don't think so, no matter how hard they try. It seems to be beyond their scope, their financial abilities, and the facilities that they have to accurately cover what's going on within the art community. And essentially, this museum that we have here isn't very large in comparison to, for instance, other museums, and yet the only thing that seemed to tie this museum in with the rest of the art community in the past had to do with the annual exhibitions held before they moved from Exposition Park. This seemed to work for a while. But it caused so much uproar, and there was so much fuss over the jury system that was connected with it and so on, they finally decided they would just step out of that entirely because it would seem that this was just a token kind of adjunct of the museum's purpose, which was to preserve and show the arts of the past.

There are so many changes taking place and the changes are so rapid, they no longer have the kind of influence they had when they could bring in a one-man

show, for example, which would then inspire the artists in the community to head off in a new direction. It's a much more complicated time, somehow; this kind of influence no longer has this effect on the art community. I can't think of anything that could possibly be shown in the museum that would necessarily have a very big effect or a lasting effect on the art community.

At one point, and I was back in New York at the time, I remember going back there and seeing two shows going on there called "Art and Technology," one at the Brooklyn Museum, the other at, I think, the Modern Museum--somehow, I'm a little blurred on that. In any case, that ongoing show induced them to have a similar show here, so that the influence of what those museums did was brought into this exhibition.

I don't know what changes could be made in relation to this, since one of the things that make it difficult, I think, for museums and for galleries in this community is the way it's spread out. You have to travel so far. It isn't like something, because you happen to be walking along the street, you can walk into and see. I know that, for instance, when I stayed in London it was possible for me to walk to many of these places--to the museums and to the galleries and so on--or, very

easily, public transportation and so on made it all very close at hand. But [here] it's so dispersed, people are so dispersed, that it no longer seems to be possible to bring anything together here; somehow, it doesn't seem to do that. I'm sorry. I wish that all these institutions and art schools and museums could all be put together in the same general vicinity. That promotes a kind of inter-communication, social connections that aren't managed otherwise. I know that things are put in different places for other reasons, usually economic reasons.

One of the reasons, for instance, the Chouinard Art Institute--which was taken over by the California Institute of the Arts--probably moved way out into the countryside, forty miles away, was an economic move that was tied in with a kind of land development scheme. This isn't ordinarily spread around, but the time the decision was made to use the accreditation of the Chouinard Art Institute, the institution was accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, and [this] was essential for raising government funds for its support and so on. Walt Disney had been supporting the school and was leaving his money to the school in his will, but they needed other matching funds in addition to this; and in order to get these government funds, they had to have accreditation. So they used the Chouinard school

primarily for their purpose to get this project started, which was to be a kind of monument to Walt Disney.

It's interesting that [H.R.] Haldeman, Nixon's henchman, was the chairman of the board that governed the school at the time that many of these decisions were made. I don't know whether to blame Haldeman for it or not, but in any case, I think it was a tragedy for the community that a school which had been literally a center of activity-- in the sense that it was an urban art school right in the middle of the city and available to students who could scarcely get busfare to go anywhere else--was moved out into an upper-middle-class suburb. The Art Center School recently moved to Pasadena, away from the center of that city, also. So now only the Otis school remains in the city. It's sad.

My feeling [was], when they were talking about facilities for the enlargement of the school, that they should have taken one of the two locations which were available to them at the time; one of them was that building across from the May Company, close to the Los Angeles Museum of Art, which was available for something like 4.5 million; it is not a department store building. In addition to the parking building in back, there were apartments. They owned the whole half-block there. That was one of the areas they could have had for the school.

They assessed that, and they decided that that wouldn't be suitable. The idea they had, evidently, was to build a monument to Walt Disney, and this would mean that they would have to have a new building designed which would somehow serve that function. So the idea of moving into an old department store--it wasn't an old department store; it was a fairly new building--or taking on someplace like the Elks Building, which was next to the Otis Art Institute and which occupies the other half of the block, which they could have had for \$750,000, would have served them admirably for the right kind of place for an art school.

Art schools seem to thrive best in kind of funky surroundings, somehow, or in the city, and that's certainly a funky building, but it did have an olympic-size swimming pool, indoor tennis courts, and four floors of dormitories or like hotel rooms on top--all kinds of space, which was terrible space, but, gee, that doesn't bother art students at all. I know those ugly sculptures on the outside depicting World War I soldiers, ugly things, but somebody might be able to shoot those off of there.

[laughter] But I thought that that would have been a great thing. They used part of it as an annex for Chouinard at one time. And the student functioned there, you know; it wasn't built ideally, but certainly the building that

was built in Valencia that was supposed to be ideal for them didn't turn out to be ideal at all. It's an impossible building to maintain economically. It's got so many exits and so many entrances that just the policing of the place is a great problem. There are buildings in New York--I saw one of those auto company buildings that just went up there on about Fifty-eighth and Fifth Avenue--which could be controlled very easily at night with two guards. They just really have two entrances. A front and a back entrance is all they had in that enormous building, fifty stories high. It was very easy to control, to police it, to keep an eye on what's going on and so on. But the building they put out there There again, it's like another big shopping center, but it's such an impossible building. They tried one time to give it away after the school had so much difficulty in operating out there; they offered it to Pepperdine University, to USC, and I don't know to who else, for whatever use they might wish to make of it--in addition, offered them \$10 million to take it over. And one of them wanted it; they wouldn't take it at any cost, mainly because it was just an impossible building and location for any use they could conceive of. I suppose that they could have. USC, as you probably know, owns buildings all along Wilshire Boulevard that they rent out to

department stores and whatnot. They get income from several of those buildings, but they wouldn't take the Cal Arts school in Valencia. No way would they accept that school. They couldn't give it away. Here was a brand-new place--I think it cost something like \$34 million to build--just an impossible building built by an architect whose main art credential for that was the fact that he had once studied music. I can't even remember his name--doesn't matter. I don't think he ever designed anything bigger than a small restaurant in Pasadena. But it's full of vast hallways, open spaces; it's another shopping center, but it wouldn't even be a very good shopping center, certainly not out there in the sticks.

ROGERS: What kind of curriculum is it offering?

JEPSON: I don't know. The only thing about the curriculum that they carried over from Chouinard was the concentrated study program which I was responsible for getting Chouinard to adopt. Soon after I got there, I talked them into getting away from a kind of academic model which is very close to ordinary schools where students take one subject for three hours, and then they change and go to another subject for three hours. Maybe they take a lecture course for an hour. Instead of taking five or six subjects simultaneously, I talked them into concentrating the

program and taking longer periods so that they would take one subject for the four days a week, for eight weeks, for example. In any case, they adopted it primarily because it saved them a great deal of money in every department of the school. It made keeping the records simpler; the number of teachers involved were fewer. All the full program teachers, for example, were only in classes two or three days a week, whereas before, there was a teacher in every class five days a week for the full period--which seemed to be ridiculous in a program where you're trying to develop motivation for independent action and work. In any case, it worked out very well for the school, enough so that was the only part of the [Chouinard] school program that they generally adopted for the new Cal Arts program, I would say. The whole art school has been reduced to probably 150 students or so. That's just hearsay, but the majority of students that they have are in film arts or music or dance or something of that kind because that's a school of the arts now. But painting and other fine arts in general are reduced, so you have, I suppose, no more majors in that field than you would find in a small college or such places as that. So I've been visiting out there on just two different occasions to see Jack Goldstein's work. Jack is a former Chouinard student who became a TA at Cal Arts where he graduated with

an MFA. Most of his work since quite literally reflects the idea of the artist as an activator of life energies. He did a conceptual piece where he was buried underground in a box with electrodes which recorded his heart-beat with a light bulb above ground.

ROGERS: You mentioned that you had felt surprise when you heard that art critics were teaching lab courses. If a nonartist-critic has something to say, who does he speak to? Does he speak to the public, or does he speak to the artist?

JEPSON: Well, this has always been a question, and it seems to be recently that they do have more and more influence. They are a kind of reflection or a kind of imitation, I would say, almost of what is going on in the universities and so on; it's natural that it would continue to go that way, it would seem to me, that it would go toward the verbal, linear kind of analysis. And the playback I get from my own son [Stephen] who is now a graduate student at the Otis Art Institute, the people he most respects are some of those people who are art critics or who write for magazines and are essentially art historians, or they are trained and developed in that direction. They seem to speak to him more; he feels a greater kinship with them, certainly than he does with some of the old-timers who are still hanging on there at

Otis that were there when I first went there twenty-two years ago last spring.

Anyway, the Otis Art Institute is a public institution in which the teachers gain tenure after being there one year. If they don't get fired the first year, then they're there forever. These people are civil servants, and they hang in there pretty much. The new directors keep coming in; they try to avoid that situation, so they use what chance they do have just to hire people for only one year at a time. That's the only flexibility they have. As I may have mentioned, I was one of the three people that was recommended to be director of the school, and when I faced that problem, frankly, although I needed a job at that point, I would have had a lot of misgivings about that kind of setup, and I didn't feel that I would be able to do anything that would help to change the status quo too much because I could see how it had been going a long time. It was fortunate for the school, I think, that Millard Sheets got the job, because he was ruthless enough and energetic enough or whatever it took. He managed to change things and to get them to tear down some of the junky old buildings and to build some new buildings and so on, which takes a good public relations man and a good salesman. And he was that; he could sell. And as long as that honeymoon went

on between him and the Board of Supervisors, that part of it worked out pretty fine.

Anyway, it would seem that there is the dissatisfaction with traditional ways of approaching education that is permeating schools everywhere, reflected mostly in a kind of dropping out which just isn't good; it's not too constructive. In any case, I think there's going to be some kind of revolution. The whole thing is bound to fall flat because they're running out of money. The people are getting so they don't want to support educational institutions anymore. At least [there is] this individual kind of anxiety about it. There is this kind of stirring in the society, and a lot of people go right along with it.

ROGERS: The economic situation and the sociological situations in the large urban areas are such now that man really has more time on his hands, and there's been a great deal of study made about leisure time and how man spends it. If this search toward arts and crafts among the young peoples continue, won't there be a demand for more schools, rather than less?

JEPSON: Well, the kind of pastime thing is probably going to be very much in demand. I think the adult education programs are usually pretty full, and there are always a lot of people who would rather do that than play

bridge or something else. But I see the role of the arts in education as having a much more serious, much more fundamental--to me, the arts would play a more vital role than they do now. That's the only way that this would produce a bunch of older people who are able to find meaning in the activity that they're engaged in, whether it's in art or anything else. Busy work, pastime work, is not the kind of thing that interests me too much. I can see the need of it; there has always been a group of people that want to come into a school way beyond the school age, and quite often, some of the older people come out with works that are vastly superior to what some of the younger students do. I recall one woman; her name was Felicia Kaner. She was a Polish woman who had come to the United States as a young woman, and she came to the class at Otis. At the time, she must have been in her mid-fifties, and she outstripped some of the brightest students I ever had in terms of the kind of quality and achievement in the work that she did. And she subsequently had considerable success through the United States, and her work was commented upon by critics in New York and reproduced in newspapers and magazines and so on. It's incredible. So you know, some people, as they get older, can take on some of these classes and go on to really achieve something important.

And so it doesn't have to be just a kind of casual pastime, something to do on Thursdays and Saturdays, whatever. Since the reactivation and regeneration of muscles in older people has been proven to be possible, there is no reason why the regeneration of creative energy and vitality could not be possible also.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE ONE

JULY 1, 1976

ROGERS: Picking up from June of 1958 when you left the Otis Art Institute as a teacher, what was your next move?

JEPSON: The primary reason for leaving, I should say, was that the salary of the school hadn't changed since the time that I started there in 1954. There had been no salary increase, and there was great difficulty financially for me to survive during that period. Because the summer program was a reduced program at Otis, a teacher could take turns in teaching it during alternate summer sessions. [As] I mentioned before, during the time that I had my own school I dropped all the commercial contacts that I had, which were more or less supporting me over the years in addition to a kind of salary that I could earn as a teacher. I had no other outside income, so I needed to do something else. And I went over to Chouinard and asked them if I could teach a class there during the next summer. I had heard rumors that they wanted me, wished I would come over there anyway, so I offered to teach there during the summer. And their reply was, "Well, we want you here very much, and we will employ you as a teacher here, have you join our staff here, if you will

continue on through the next year." Their idea was, they really didn't need me for the summer--they already had too many teachers lined up for the summer--but they would take me on if I would stay on their staff in school. They also offered me an increase of a couple of thousand a year in salary, so I decided to take it. Millard Sheets was very upset about it and seemed to feel that I had "stabbed him in the back" is the way he put it. But I had for quite a long time been sort of pressuring him to try to get more money out of the supervisors for myself, and, of course, for the other teachers as well, and his remark was, "Well, we would be lucky if we didn't get it cut," because the supervisors were complaining about the budget and so on. So I had to just take it upon myself to look for another job. I wasn't too happy about the kind of pressures that he had put on some of the other teachers and things of that kind, although he didn't give me any trouble; I had managed to satisfy his requirements whatever they might be. Nevertheless, I left, and to him, I guess, it was sort of sudden. I didn't give him enough warning, perhaps, but it seemed to me that I gave him plenty of hints that I was in need of something else.

In any case, I went over to Chouinard, and one of the things that encouraged me about the place was the staff that they had at the time. They had two teachers, in

particular; one was Richards Ruben, and the other was Bob Irwin. I had known Bob Irwin as a student somewhat. He was very young when he attended the Jepson Art Institute, and he didn't impress me enough so that I had remembered that he had been there. But recently someone told me [Bob] was talking about having attended my classes, so he had been a student there. But that wasn't what encouraged me. I had heard a lot about him from people that I know that knew him, and I was very much in sympathy with the point of views that he seemed to be taking and so on. Oh, I can remember, too, that I had occasion to visit one of his classes, which was just a beginning class in painting, but he was doing remarkable things with the students there. I think he, unquestionably, was one of the best beginning painting teachers that I have ever known. I never saw anyone who could take a class of beginners and do as much with them in a brief time as he did.

And Richards Ruben was a very progressive young man who I knew also and had contact with. I can't recall when I first got to know him, but he had attended my school and he studied serigraphy, printmaking at the school. He took special classes just in that subject. These two people seemed to be kind of the dynamic force there in school, though there were a good many other teachers. They had too many teachers, really, but part of this was

due to the kind of fragmentation of classes, of schedules, and so on which was, as I think I mentioned previously, a kind of the imitation of a regular academic program where they take all these different subjects at the same time and so on.

And one of the things also that was going on there at the time [was], they had recently gained support of Walt Disney to explore the possibility of expanding the school, developing a new campus, and things of that kind. And this went on for a long time before they finally got around to it. But much of this kind of new look to the place had started--some new young teachers--and there seemed to be a good deal of energy and vitality there. They brought in a new man by the name of Mitch [Mitchell A.] Wilder, who had been a director of a school in Colorado; after he left that position, he was director of Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, Fort Worth, Texas. But it was a very exciting, dynamic kind of period for the school because of the fact it was undergoing a change, and this always seems to bring a kind of new vitality for a while before the old guard status quo takes over again and starts to bring it back into, you know, the same old place, the same kind of a school it had gotten into when Mrs. Chouinard was in charge, still the president of the board. When things were going well financially for the

school, she sort of let go. She wasn't as active within the school as she was when things went badly. Her maiden name was Murphy, and she had a kind of Irish stick-to-itiveness, willingness to work, and work hard. She seemed to thrive on adversity. If things started to go downhill and needed help, well, then she really pitched in and started to take over and do things, but as long as things were going along very easily for her, she sort of lost interest. Of course, she was becoming an old lady by that time, anyway. Mitch Wilder was very open to any suggestion, any kind of new idea that you might suggest. And in the meetings that we had, anything that was suggested that seemed to have some feasibility, he would say, "Let's try it." He would, you know, right away. It wasn't a question of, "Well, we'll study it," or "We'll think about it," or "I'll present it to the board." Just "Go ahead and do it." So for a while, this gave the place a lot of vitality, although he, I think, rubbed the board in the wrong way because he didn't ask them too many things about how to conduct school affairs. And they felt, perhaps, that he should be out trying to raise funds or something. (Boards usually are more interested in things of that kind than they are in the internal operations of the school.) But he seemed to give any kind of support that the teachers needed. And he had a

marvelous secretary, Pat Dacy; she was really an executive secretary or assistant director--I don't know what her title was. But she was fantastic in her capacity to put out work. If you wanted something typed, she could do it while she was carrying on conversation about something else, do it without any error or mistake. She was very efficient and very fast, and this kind of implemented the whole program and helped to make things seem to move along very well.

And they brought in a young fellow by the name of Gerry [Gerald] Nordland who, I think, had something to do with starting this [oral history] project. Gerry Nordland's interest in art was reflected in the fact that he was working as a critic. Once a month, he did a little column in a west coast magazine, Frontier, a very small kind of a magazine. And they finally got around to [it and] made him the dean of the school and during his tenure as dean he brought a lot of new blood into the school system, primarily in the general education department, where he probably had a completely free hand, or a nearly free hand, in bringing in whomever he might wish. I think he was responsible for bringing Jules Langsner in there-- I don't know whether Langsner had been there before or not; I can't remember. He brought in John Coplans and a man that was, I think, one of the editors of

Artforum, Philip Leider. But they were, of course, the kind of people who were very interested in new directions. Artforum was a sort of avant-garde magazine of Southern California before it moved to New York. I imagine through his contact with the magazine and with local art dealers in the community and so on, whenever an artist of a national reputation came to town, he [Gerry] would get them to come and lecture at the school.

So there was a kind of vitality and a kind of mix of things. I've always felt that Chouinard generally was a kind of funky place--the classes and the various courses and the people who were brought in for no other reason than they thought that they might give some new direction to the school, without any thought of any kind of general purpose or goal or educational theory or philosophy or anything of that kind. And it seemed that [it was in keeping with] the character of the times, the kind of thinking, the mode of thought that was going on in the art community at that time both with some of these new people that were being brought in and with the new students who also reflected that kind of thinking--at least if they hadn't been thinking in that direction, they were very quickly brought into it by the two principal teachers that were teaching the beginning students; that was Richards Ruben and Bob Irwin.

In addition, one of the members of the board who was the head of the advertising department (Harry Diamond) was a very progressive educator--a really fantastic person--in some of the things that he was having the students do as a preparation, as a kind of preliminary development for advertising. He was exploring all kinds of things. He was having them read a lot of esoteric poetry and literature and all kinds of things in order to stimulate their imaginations. And he was the strongest supporter of the fine art departments. Even in the fine art department some of the old-timers there were trying to approach the basic classes--drawing, painting, composition, and that kind--as kind of adjuncts to applied art in the school. And he fought vigorously against that kind of suggestion; whenever it was suggested in the faculty meetings, he would have a fit about the idea that they should concern themselves in any way with practical applications. And here he was a man who was in that field, so he knew what he was talking about; he knew what he was looking for as an art editor and art director. He was head of some advertising firm here in L.A. at that time. He was married to Mrs. Chouinard's niece. He had been teaching there for some time and had a good deal of force on the board. He was offered a job as art director of the publications for the Standard

Oil Corporation of New Jersey with an office in the Rockefeller Center, New York City, and he left the school and left us without that influence which was a very important force in the school. I think from then on, the board began to submit to these efficiency managers that they brought in. I don't know exactly where they got some of these people. I remember one director's name; he only lasted one year. His name was Dr. [John] Vincent. He was an academician, not an artist. He had been chairman of a music or some other department at UCLA, and he wasn't effective at all; he didn't accomplish anything.

Because we were sort of feeling our way about art education and innovations in the field and so on, I made a suggestion that we establish what I called the Council on Research in Art Education. And I had contact with people in the community, people that were interested in art and creativity, in particular, that I know would support it, and so I listed a group of five board members for this program with the idea of eventually getting foundation funds for it. And I ran up against obstacles right from the very start. As I think back on it, I made a mistake in putting a Nobel Prize winner, Dr. Linus Pauling, at the head of the list. At one time, he had been given an honorary BA by Mrs. Chouinard, and

at one time, he had given the commencement address at this school, so I knew he was interested in the school. And I knew from what I read and the things that he was exploring and so on that he would be interested enough to perhaps at least lend his name to it. This, right at the top, was a red flag to this conservative board, headed by Mr. [H.R.] Haldeman, and, of course, Dr. Vincent, the director. This was in the middle of the sixties. Linus Pauling was a kind of leader against the atom bomb, and anybody that was against the atom bomb was suspected of being a Communist. [laughter] And this created a kind of uproar; they objected to his name. And [there were] other people on there [the list] that I knew that had given lectures on creativity, like the man who was the head of the psychology department at USC. I have that list somewhere here, and I should bring it into this some way. In any case, the program never got off the ground. One of the reasons it didn't get off the ground I had suggested that we bring in people just to introduce them to the school with the idea that they might be further interested if we asked them to come and talk with the students. One of the primary members of the board was from I think Walt Disney enterprises, a man by the name of Royal Clark--they called him Mickey Clark. Anyway, he was a very stingy

member of that whole thing; I think he had a very dim view of the art school business. He was so involved with his multimillion-dollar projects and so on, I think the school was always a source of irritation more than anything else. And he was, at that point, squeezing the budget so that all they would offer to these people was an honorarium of fifty dollars to come and talk. And I felt that that would be an insult, that it would be better to ask them to come and do it for nothing. But the general attitude was that this whole program should be either restudied or started by somebody else, I don't know. In any case it never got off the ground.

But this is, I think, one of the difficulties that came during that period when they were exploring the idea of expanding the school, and eventually, when they did decide to go ahead, they spent enormous amounts of money on just the planning of the new school. Chouinard wasn't making money, but private schools don't make money, anyway. However, the night school was making money, and they gummed that up by tinkering with the program, trying to expand it in ways that weren't feasible and so on. But they weren't willing to do anything to expand or improve the school as it existed. It became, I think, increasingly clear that what they had in mind was to take over and just get rid of the old

school, the faculty, the plant, and so on in Los Angeles, and do an entirely new theme.

This, of course, went back and forth for quite a while, but in the meantime, the school had been remarkably successful in developing people who had made names for themselves in the national and the international scene for fifty years, which was, I think, especially in the early sixties, right up to '65 and '66, the most unique period for the Chouinard Art School and for Los Angeles. I can't think of any period where there were that many people just coming up, new people, new faces in the art world who were getting such wide recognition. And much of it came from the efforts of Gerry Nordland and the people he brought into the school. Nordland isn't the most dynamic leader in the world and is not inclined to push his ideas too much. He did, I think, remarkably well, in his quiet way, within the limitations that they seemed to be imposing on him all the time. I think he finally got disgusted and quit because they never really gave him the authority that presumably would have come under dean of the school in charge, really, of the whole place. When they organized the new school, they put a dean at the head of every department. Even though it didn't have more than fifty students, [a department] had a dean who was getting

a top salary, unquestionably a lot more than Nordland ever got there.

But as I look back on it, I think that he did as much for the Chouinard Art School as anybody they had ever had. I wasn't happy about what he was doing for me; he didn't manage to get me a raise in the first four and a half years. I got a raise when I started from what I had been getting at Otis, but I didn't get any other kind of a raise out of the place, in spite of the fact that they had adopted my suggestions for the concentrated program which had saved them a lot of money at the school, and he published the part I had played in a school catalog about what a benefit it was and so on. In any case, I have to give him credit for what was going on there, more than any one person, both directly and indirectly. I don't think he published so very much--he wasn't writing so very much at that time--but by bringing in the people he did, the critics and the artists and so on, and by his contacts with the galleries who had connections with New York galleries, etc., that sort of developed into a kind of thing where a good many graduates have all had work shown in Europe. And I have since seen many of these myself in London, Paris, and Amsterdam. I have this list here, and I suppose I should read it off. I don't know whether I should make

any comment about any one of these individuals. . . .

ROGERS: Why don't you?

JEPSON: Well, I think it's rather irrelevant first of all, since I have no feeling of having been responsible for this even though they may have been students in my classes at some time. The kinds of directions that they've taken and the things that they're doing seem to be all self-motivated, which is primarily what art school should be about. I think in general that they reflect a kind of independence that puts them immediately outside of kind of a school reference. In England, it's a generally accepted idea that everybody there goes through the same kind of training and background. Because there are so many art schools I suppose there is a certain kind of stereotype education that they go through regardless of what school they go to. This is all accepted as a part of their biography. When they're talking about their past, they all mention this. I suppose it has something to do with the continuation of the old-school-tie kind of thing, but this revolution that went on here among the students separates them from that, except I think that this is where it all started. At the same time, even their associations and the kinds of groups of people that have gotten together have stayed together and supported each other and so on. This is due, of course, to

the fact that they probably went to school together. A good many of them have remained together and worked together at their studios subsequently. Most of them have independent studios now, I suppose, but at least they all seem to appear when certain gallery openings come. If one of this crowd of people has a show, why, they will show up. This could be a kind of cliquishness about it, I suppose.

ROGERS: Just for the record, why don't you include as many as you wish to in this group.

JEPSON: Well, I have this list here, and they're not in alphabetical order or anything, and not according to their particular significance. Tom Wudl, Jack Goldstein, Larry Bell, Joe Goode--Larry Bell, Joe Goode, and Charles Arnoldi were in my classes at Chouinard at the same time. Wudl may have been in there; he came in a little bit later, but I think he may have been in at that time. Laddie Dill was in at the same time, and Guy Dill studied with me a little later, I think. Ed Ruscha Terry O'Shea, Natalie Bieser, Doug[las] Wheeler. Doug Wheeler probably spent as much time in my classes as anybody and was a very conscientious student. Well, he was an extremely hard worker, and there wasn't anything you could suggest that he wouldn't try and would not only carry out within a class program; but he would carry on

his own projects outside of the class, so he always was a prolific producer. He was still in the class when I made a movie in 1954 on the art of drawing.

I made a movie of the class at the time with a filmmaker, Ken Nelson, that came in to do a film on the school for Walt Disney. They wanted to have a film of the school activities in order to promote this new project, the development of a new school. And the idea of making a film, a movie of the whole school, was to use it as a fund-raising device. During the making of that, I became acquainted with Ken Nelson, who was the producer. I don't know whether they gave him film credit for that or not, but Ken Nelson did many of Disney's nature films and things of that kind, wrote the script for the films on sailplanes that he directed. He did many nature films, like Teton Marsh and a lot of those other special films that were made for Disney.

In visiting my classes he became interested in what I was doing there and suggested that we make a film of the class. So this we did on a kind of joint venture. He provided all the important technology and know-how and his time, and I paid for the film and the technical work that was necessary to have other people do on the film. And we did a film of my class. It was done without any script or editing or anything; it was just a spontaneous

kind of random thing. And it wasn't done in color because that would require bringing lights and things of that kind which would interfere with the class. It was distributed throughout the United States, but it wasn't especially successful as a film, and financially it wasn't a big success either. But nevertheless, we made it. Doug Wheeler was very much in evidence through that film, at least the back of his head, and I showed him drawing in two or three shots.

I didn't mention too many of the teachers that were there. John Altoon was a teacher in the night classes there for two different periods.

ROGERS: What do you remember about John Altoon? Did you know him?

JEPSON: Oh, yes, over the years. Because he was around the city, I had become acquainted with him. They had asked me to be the juror for a show that was held down in La Jolla, their museum [La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art] there. I don't know whether they call it museum now or a gallery; I guess it's a gallery in La Jolla. It's quite prominent and quite progressive, and they asked me to be on the jury. And I had no idea who the people were. One of the stipulations of the show was that I not know who the exhibitors were. They didn't give me the names; they just stood the paintings around the wall.

And I remember I gave John Altoon second prize. It actually wasn't a painting--it was a painting show, but it wasn't a painting--but I thought it was the best thing in the show. So I sort of hedged a little and gave him the second prize. [doorbell rings; tape recorder turned off] I was surprised to learn that I had given Donald Brewer, the gallery director, the first prize. I'm sure that everyone thought that the award was a setup.

ROGERS: How did the students at Chouinard in the sixties differ from those you had in the thirties?

JEPSON: Well, I think that one distinctive, great difference was that the students in the thirties were more inclined to accept authority than the ones in the sixties. They went to school with the idea that they would be presented examples of the past by the teachers of the direction that they probably think that they should go. I had considerable questions and doubts about it then; however, I don't think I was demonstrating it in my actual practice. I'm quite convinced I wasn't demonstrating that kind of questioning attitude toward what was going on that I later felt was needed. I think the whole atmosphere in the sixties, not only the students going to art school but the community in general, was one of question and doubt about most everything going on. So this, I think, made it a much better climate in which to

work; it didn't necessarily reflect everybody else's idea in the school, I would say. I think that one of the things that happens as you grow older in a job of this kind is that at that point, I was looked on as sort of an old-timer. There's a kind of stigma attached to that. So many people remember you in the "good old days." About that time I ran into Millard Sheets at a party and he asked, "Are you still teaching fundamentals the way you taught in the old days?" I replied, "I should hope not!" There was the kind of thing in the air where you shouldn't trust anybody over thirty and so on. So it seemed to me that during that period that the people who were having the most influence on the students were those younger teachers, Bob Irwin and Richards Ruben.

TAPE NUMBER: VI, SIDE TWO

JULY 1, 1976

ROGERS: You were saying that the younger teachers were probably more accepted by the students than the older ones?

JEPSON: Oh, yes. And you could see this was the kind of feeling that was in the air. And I think that it was very difficult for them to separate their opinions--you know, the expectations and so on that they might have about me and my classes and what I would teach and so on--from what I was trying to do. I think that in the school as a whole there was a kind of traditional way of teaching that dominated them to the extent that in spite of the fact that most of these people may have been questioning and doubting what went on, they were conditioned to expect authority--in spite of the fact that they didn't really want that at all. Consequently, there was, I think, this kind of split all of the time. And I would have to say that a couple of the students who happened to be in the class at the same time, like Larry Bell and Joe Goode, were always in attendance, in class in time and so on, throughout the whole period, and seemed to be listening intently, but seldom said very much to me. I think one of my faults as a teacher was that I wasn't able to get

them to play back very much, especially in the classroom situation. I think a class that works best is where there is someone who is sort of like a devil's advocate who has strong objections to what you say, and I always felt that this person was probably the only one who was listening anyway. [laughter] [phone rings; tape recorder turned off]

Larry Bell and Joe Goode were an example of two students who were very faithful in coming to class; they were always in class. And then one thing that sort of bothered me, and I talked about it a little bit: they were always not only in class but in the same spot in the room, which I felt was a kind of an indication of a kind of rigidity that bothered me. In addition, they did the same kind of things when they started as when they finished the class. There was very little change in that. But they did seem to listen, and Larry Bell, in particular, was always after me to go to his "studio," as he called it. He had a kind of room in a basement of an old apartment house down where I think the furnace and the water heaters were, and he wanted me to come see what he was doing, see his work, which I did. But as a whole, I can't say that I influenced him very much. I remember one time he was commenting about my class--this was outside of class. He said, "I think you're a mystic."

Well, I said that I thought that probably what I was trying to say was a mystery to him, but I didn't feel that I was a mystic. [laughter] And in any case, they continued in the class. Some of these other people--Joe Goode, in particular, people like Ed Ruscha and some of the others--had been in the school, probably been in other classes where they had already established a kind of momentum of their own before they came to mine. I can't recall having that much effect on them. Doug Wheeler was one who would follow the suggestions that I made and would try most everything; there wasn't anything he wouldn't try, and he seemed to be extremely competent and was managing to come up with a considerable body of work in addition to the work he did in the classroom, which would relate to the suggestions I made and so on.

Some of the girls, like Mary Corta and Natalie [Bieser] I'm trying to think of her last name. I can't. I can't think of her last name. They're typical, I think: very quiet and seemed very passive about what was going on, and I can't recall what they did in class. They seemed to be there and to do the work and be interested in what was going on and so on, but they didn't affect me that much. It seemed that throughout my career as a teacher, the ones who affected me the most--and that includes my wife, Marcia--were the ones who not only

couldn't seem to follow any kind of direction that I might give, but who did work on their own which was unique and more exciting to me than any of the stuff of the students who seemed to conform to whatever premise might be established in class at the time. I think that had as much to do with turning me around as anything, because I had to admit that as I look back on students of this type, it seemed to be more girls than boys. They don't have the same kind of facility and ability to adapt to new directions, and yet what they do do seems to be kind of totally intuitive and spontaneous originality from within themselves.

And as I mentioned previously, one of the arguments that I had with Howard Warshaw dealt with the fact that he seemed to be so prejudiced against some of the students who weren't stars, and that always included all of the girls, I think, in general. Although Howard is sensitive enough to have a good deal of insight: he did recognize the quality in the works that they were doing. When they would bring works in, he would always point out the fact that they weren't doing the problem; [laughter] they hadn't solved the problem he had set up, but there was something else going on there that was worth paying attention to.

I think it's very important that all teachers should

recognize that there are people who can guess better than a lot of other people can figure, that there is an intuitive side of our natures which needs to be developed, and that, of course, is part of what my teaching has been about, with hopes that I was directing it towards the development of the whole intelligence, not just directional, linear, the convergent-thinking side of the mind. The overemphasis on this had always bothered me because it seemed that, at least as we look back in retrospect over the years, if you read what artists say about their work in general, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense. What they sought and what they say is often terrible, but what they do is far beyond all of that. I think that Picasso, in particular, was the kind of person who recognized this limitation; he wouldn't submit to interviews if he could help it. There are a good many quotations of things that he had said offhand, naturally, over all the years of talking to his friends and so on--they would report these things--but in general he resisted too much talk about what he was doing. But now the whole trend is quite different, and if we were to go back to talking about the difference between these students and the students of previous periods, they--at least since they left school, and probably during the school--had become increasingly verbal and analytical in terms of

what they were doing, more conceptual in every way. Whether or not this is a kind of a rationalization or a kind of excuse for a kind of poverty in their production of work, I wouldn't want to say. But I do notice that most of this work almost demands that you read some kind of perspective that relates to what's going on. Without knowledge of the concept that's behind what they do, it doesn't reach us or move us. How long this will last is a question. As far as I can tell, historians paid very little real attention to what artists have said about what they were doing because there was always this gap, this separation, between what they're saying and the belief systems which are current at the time these historians go to school and develop their own interests and ideas and so on. So invariably, the words that they use to describe what's going on in the works of the past is viewed from the position that it is their own belief systems, their own concepts and ideas, that they have to bring into their analysis of the work. Consequently, it would seem to me that you get very little clue from this, [unless] we were able to put ourselves into that role, and this is where I get into a problem here in analyzing my students. I have to accept the idea that they belong to an entirely different generation. They come from a different time, and the things that concern them, the

things that have meaning to them, have a different kind of meaning from me than they do for them, even though I might listen. And, after all, I have a son (Stephen) who is now a graduate student at Otis, and he talks to me about it, and we have even jointly written some papers about psychobiological foundations of creativity, for example. This is such a different time and a different place, so it's hard to assess. One thing that seems very evident to me [is] that this emphasis on the concept is somehow egocentric, in the sense that it puts the emphasis back on the artist as a star in this scene, as it were. Consequently, we see people like this one fellow--they call him the Evel Knievel of the art world; I mean those who want to make cracks about him--I went to a couple of his openings. Can we stop a minute? [tape recorder turned off] [We see] people like Chris Burden, who is focusing entirely on things he does to himself, like being in a room where if he doesn't watch out, he's liable to be electrocuted. . . . He has people shoot at him, and, I don't know, he does all kinds of stunts. And, for instance, recently he's been running ads in New York television. All the ad has in it is "Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Picasso, Chris Burden." [laughter] So anyway, this kind of calling attention to themselves as actors, as stars, seems to be a focus of attention

away from creative products of any kind.

This lack of involvement in the end product is, in many cases, reflected in the fact that most of the work of a good many of these people who have become very successful has been [done by others], especially in prints. For example, they get somebody else to do the print for them. They get other persons to do the work. I remember I used to go to Molly Barnes. Molly Barnes had a kind of an avant-garde gallery on La Cienega. There was one artist there--I can't think of his name at this moment--and he had an assistant who had cans of paint. And he would direct him to pour these various cans of paint at certain places in the room, right on the cement floor. And this event has been published, and the photographs taken of the sequence of changes that took place during the process of dumping this paint on the floor have all been photographically recorded and been shown in the Modern Museum in New York and so on.

ROGERS: Isn't this more theater than it is art?

JEPSON: Yes, well, it's closely allied to performance art. It's kind of a mixture of concept art and process art and the artist as the performer, as an entertainer almost, although artists object to that description. "Entertainer" doesn't suit them because they like to think of themselves more as a spokesman or commentator whose medium

is working with the whole gallery or the physical landscape. A good many of these things are social commentaries, the state of the art in the community and so on. This seems to be compounded by a tendency to become more and more removed, more and more detached from the traditional role of an artist in his studio at work producing paintings, sculptures, and objects of various kinds. It has gone a way toward a kind of passive detachment where the artist's role is one of a kind of cool, detached superstar who is around to be admired by the public. In regard to them is one of these extremely prominent painters in this town, and when I used to go to exhibitions I would always know where to find him because he [was] always right in the middle of the gallery right near the front door, so as you came in you had to see Billy Al Bengston. He may be playing a different role now. Anyway, this need--to be seen at the right places and not others, and who goes, who is seen with who and at what show, and who is invited and who's not invited--seems to be very much a part of this art scene today.

And the kind of cool detachment is compounded by the general use of marijuana, smoking pot. The whole thing-- I was going to say is going to pot Along toward the last in the sixties, it was so prevalent in the school situation. Students come to class, and they think they're

very smart because they think people don't notice or know that they're high on pot. But they're so indifferent and so passive and so detached because the use of it. Even when they're no longer using pot, prior use conditions the alerting part of the brain to turn off or ignore intense feelings about everything. It tells the mind, "Be cool, be quiet. Nothing is happening; nothing very significant is going on." It kind of removes anxiety and feelings of alienation, and I see the whole scene as sort of a continuation of this tendency to become more and more removed from the role of an artist as a sensitive productive being so that the ideas he has, the things he dreams about--the "alibis" he concocts--are characteristic of the use of the drug. And it's extremely noticeable in this society. Disturbs me, but I don't know what to do about it. I'm no reformer; I'm not a preacher. I suppose the whole syndrome is the symptom of a need to withdraw from feelings of alienation and anxiety by getting stoned.

And I think that this is the great change. I've talked to a lot of teachers, and to get students really involved and committed or excited and, you know, gung-ho about school and about work and what they're doing with their lives seems to be almost nonexistent. Difficult assignments that require some kind of sustained involvement

and commitment are not well received by students anymore. For instance, a sculptor friend of mine, John Canavier, who I may have mentioned before I was partially, at least, instrumental in getting him to teach at Chouinard when I went back there. I got him, Malcolm Leland, Milly Rocque, and Fred Hammersley, who had all been students of mine [and] teachers in my school. Malcolm Leland and John Canavier were just students there--Milly Rocque was a teacher there--but I got Chouinard to get them into the school as teachers because I thought they would contribute a great deal. But coming back, John Canavier was telling me that he doesn't assign problems that require sustained effort to his classes over any period of time at the university anymore. He's teaching sculpture, which usually requires that kind of preparation and planning and work time and so on, and he just can't get students to do that kind of project anymore. They just can't sustain that kind of concentration.

Whether this is a symptom of society generally, or whether I think it's a combination of things. I think that we are headed for trouble because I've seen [it] so many times. This especially, I think, happened during the sixties, although experiments with LSD and things of that kind were going on in the fifties--several of the students at Otis were experimenting with

LSD. It seemed in the sixties that this really developed a kind of momentum, so toward the last of the sixties, I noticed more and more people who had come into the school that were really turned on, that were eager, full of vitality, enthusiasm, but not long after became very passive, sort of detached and uninvolved. It's a sad thing to see, and it's hard to work in a classroom where people are obviously sort of out of it, not as noticeably as if they would get drunk or something like that. It was a kind of, you know, indifference, a kind of passive acceptance of everything. Whatever is going on, everything is cool. Nobody's upset or anxious or worried or anything, but nothing's happening.

ROGERS: Does it destroy the creativity?

JEPSON: Yeah, of course. It destroys motivation because the subconscious alerting mechanism in the brain is the most easily conditioned or inhibited, the thing that turns on signals to the part of the brain that tells you something's happening, you know, something that is important is going on. If that has been subconsciously conditioned to behave as if nothing is happening--

"Everything's cool; everything's quiet; nothing to worry about; the whole world is beautiful; you don't have to worry about anything"--it shuts down the alerting mechanism.

I don't know whether I've talked about this before

or not; this has to do with [what] I think they call the reticular activating system that's at the end of the brain stem. It's a very small part of the brain connected with the defense mechanism in the brain, [in] animals especially but humans also. The example that's usually given how it works, how easily it's conditioned, explains how people can be conditioned to ignore all kinds of outside signals. You can learn to sleep when a fire engine is going by if you live in the city where there are cars going by and so on. But a mother, if her child, especially a newborn baby, just whimpers in the night, she's awake immediately, alert immediately, right away. Or they usually give the example: if a man smells smoke in a house, he will probably wake up very quickly, but otherwise he might sleep through all kinds of noise and things going by. So this is a part of the brain that turns on or turns off the whole system. And people who are habitually turned off by their environment or bored or detached are not very productive, of course. And the only stimulation they can get is by some kind of overt excitement, and the need often manifests itself. I mean, it's more in a kind of search for entertainment or excitement. You want to go to a party or go to a movie to have some kind of outside need for stimulation which is symptomatic of kind of nerve-energy starvation.

Tension-awareness energy, which generates the content and the physical substance in the nerve cells, in the brain cells, is not taken care of when people are in a kind of unaware catatonic state.

ROGERS: Does alcohol have the same affect on an artist?

JEPSON: It doesn't seem to condition people in the same way. It has an entirely different effect on the mind, unquestionably. You know, excessive use of alcohol can, in time, cause brain damage and so on. But it doesn't seem to directly affect the brain as much as marijuana does. I don't know. I'm not competent to survey that. All I have to say is I notice a great difference between people. I've seen students who became alcoholics even while they were in school, by the time they're twenty-one; this is not uncommon. It does have the effect of reducing their productivity, of course, tremendously. But marijuana seems to affect the alerting mechanism more than anything else. What it does: it seems to tell the mind, "Everything's okay. Things are all great. There's nothing to worry about, and everything is lovely. There's nothing to be anxious about, get excited about."

And if there is a focus, it has a limiting effect, the focus of attention on one particular aspect of experience to the exclusion of all others. It always seemed to me to be necessary for artists to have a kind

of a divergent awareness, an expanding awareness, a consciousness, a kind of an interdependence of things rather than a concentration, local focus--although for certain purposes, because of what you decide to do as an artist, you will focus directly on a very limited area and consciously do that at the time. It's the condition and the habits of thought which kind of compounds a sort of boredom and detachment that seems to kill motivation and is diametrically opposed to the drive and need for increased awareness, sensitivity, and responsiveness which seems to be characteristic of a creative mind, a creative intelligence. Anyway, it's just incredible how much this kind of thing has been pervading our culture. Pot has taken the place of alcohol in a good many cases, because hangovers aren't severe. A good many people don't seem to have any hangovers at all. This, of course, is terrible. I think probably the fact that some people don't have hangovers has made more alcoholics out of them than anything else they do. At least in my case, the fact that I have those God-awful hangovers made me decide that I just couldn't take it any more. I quit drinking almost entirely because I have foresight enough to think, "My God, I'll feel great tonight, but I'll feel like hell tomorrow." [laughter] So I think that the alcoholics

that I've known never seem to have a hangover. One of the really greatest troubles was that there was nothing to inhibit them from taking another snootful.

ROGERS: During the years that these young men were working at Chouinard, were they exhibiting? And how did the community accept what they were doing?

JEPSON: Not many of them were showing too much while they were students, but very soon after, within a year or two after they left school, they got into shows. One thing I noticed [was] that there was a tendency for them to While as students they were naturally attracted to certain people who were almost ready to graduate, to the older students, and then they kept up this friendship, and I don't know very many that didn't, at one time or another, work in the studios of some of those artists who were doing work which required a lot of assistants. [DeWain] Valentine and some of those people were working with plastics--what do you call them--doing large sculptures and paintings. By the way, there's somebody I missed here while I was naming students who did very large paintings with some of these plastics. (I should be able to name the name of these plastics because I've used some of them myself, but there are various kinds of plastic.) Well, the tendency was for them to work very large, and they were doing these enormous sculptures--some

of them which weighed, you know, hundreds of pounds and even tons--and then doing these sculptures and large paintings and things of that type. They were employing many of these students as assistants in their studios, and so associations were being carried on through this kind of activity. I was thinking of Valentine, but I can't think of some of the others. I should; they weren't students of the school, but our students were working in their studios. The word got around that they were hiring art students to work with this plastic--a very dangerous occupation, I may say, because most of these studios didn't have proper ventilation.

ROGERS: Do you believe that this gave what you might call the "L.A. look" to art?

JEPSON: Well, probably their associations with minimal artists were the kind of experiences which gave a minimal quality to the "L.A. look" that went on at that time. I think it's changing all the time, you know, like everything else. Well, as long as they were making products, making sculptures and paintings and hangings and various kinds of things, there was a tendency toward a kind of mixed thing which was neither sculpture nor painting--three-dimensional works of various kinds which used the whole gallery. Some of them were put on the floor, some of them hung from the ceiling and so on;

but as long as they were doing that kind of work, there did seem to be a quality that was very much like the kind of work going on in this locality. It had a kind of an austerity, kind of simplicity, oh, minimal quality that was characteristic of work going on in Southern California--although they wouldn't accept the idea of any connection, [it was] a sort of continuation of the kind of thing that [Lorser] Feitelson and some of those people, the minimalists, did earlier. Fred Hammersley (who is now teaching at the University of New Mexico), as I mentioned, was a student of mine at the Jepson Art Institute and then became a teacher there. And also he's one of the people I got them to hire at Chouinard when I went there because I felt that he would contribute a lot to the school. But I think that art in the community reflects the society, and the difference between the work being done here is like the difference between Los Angeles and New York as a city. It's more open. There's a lot of sunshine, there's no crowding, there's no kind of high-pressure atmosphere that you find in New York, and that does make for a difference. It's a reflection of a change, and it's hard to evaluate those differences except that [for] anyone who has lived either in New York or London, for example, as I have, the differences are tremendous. Really, it's obvious, the difference in

the feeling about the places. Having lived here most of my life, I would say that's probably why the difference hit me with such impact when I moved to London, for example--the impact of the difference seemed to be so obvious to me.

ROGERS: Is there a California school of painting then or school of art?

JEPSON: I don't know. I question "school" ideas because "school" suggests a kind of following of a certain philosophical position. If it's a school, I suppose it might be the conceptual school. It's obviously different, but the artists themselves are different from each other. So the difference is that kind of difference; it's a subtle difference, and the differences ought to do with sort of kind of social attitude and maybe the sociological difference that characterizes this place. I think from an outsider's point of view, it may look kind of parochial, but I think that's always been so.

People who live in cities, one city or the other wherever it is, have a kind of snobbish attitude towards those who live in the other cities, even though it may be almost identical in some ways. This was brought home to me One time I became acquainted with a man who lived in a country place, sort of a country town--not a country town, but a small, relatively small country

Can't think of the country north of Sweden--Sibelius

ROGERS: Finland?

JEPSON: Finland. Now, [it was] a major town in Finland directly across the river from another Russian town--what that is I don't know; I can't recall now--but he swore to me that the people that lived across that river were not to be trusted, that they were a bunch of

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE ONE

JULY 8, 1976

ROGERS: You were discussing the differences or the lack of differences between people that live in different cities the last time we were together.

JEPSON: Well, I think this is obvious, at least to me, and I think to most people. People take on something of the character of their environment, and, of course, this has a lot to do, I think, with the way they grew up.

The kind of place the person was raised in, the kind of city or town, makes a lot of difference in their general appearance and probably the same in the arts. There is something that changes in spite of how much a person might wish to retain his own individuality or individual uniqueness or how much he might feel that he is not affected by his environment. There is undoubtedly some effect on him and what he produces as a kind of extension of himself, as I see art, in the way we see all behavior. All people seem to express who they are and where they are. Even those persons who are mimics and who mimic others are not exactly like the other person; who they are is revealed by their behavior. So that you might say even that a person who does nothing at all, just sits and stares into space, is expressing his state of being.

[It] is somehow revealed and can't be disguised in any way. And we all know that we recognize these differences in people. The fact that we know so many different people, and we recognize their voices--we know them on the telephone--these differences are so subtle that it's very hard to explain it or hard to describe it. Yet it exists, and it's a very real thing that accounts for the real difference in all people. At the same time, there's this general character, and it seems to go through, so that a person like yourself, Marjorie--you obviously were raised in a small town. To me, you're not a typical Brentwood person; you're not typical of Southern California or the Los Angeles area or so on. These differences to me are readily apparent, I think. Maybe I recognize this because I was raised in a relatively small town (now it's a suburb of Los Angeles), Glendale; it's the town where I spent most of my youth, and it was a relatively small town. I really can't remember how many lived there, but by the time I graduated I don't think there were more than 5,000 people there in the whole total area, if there were that many at the time. We lived for twelve years in the outskirts of the area, so it was pretty much a country-like atmosphere. So when we talk about a "Los Angeles look" or a Los Angeles characteristic, it's very hard to say whether that is anything but the kind of

general differences you would find in the difference between people in a very larger town--I call this a town rather than a city--compared to people who come from a small, sparsely populated area.

As I mentioned about the man that I knew from the north [Finland], the fact that he felt that there was a great difference between his people on his side of the river from a town that was approximately the same size. Nevertheless, one belonged to Russia and the other to Finland. I think that there are things going on, probably within the community, that are special and unique to that community. However, I think in a broader sense, they do reflect the kind of activity and kind of thought that's going on generally throughout not only the United States but the world itself.

I can recall taking a trip to San Francisco during the period right after World War II, and I visited the California School of Fine Arts, as I think it was called then. [It] may have been the Institute of Fine Arts. It is now probably a college, but it was run by the city of San Francisco. And it was quite a shock to me to see the difference between what was going on in San Francisco and what was going on in Los Angeles, especially in that art school in comparison to the art schools here. At that time, the whole San Francisco movement was moving

in a kind of special direction that was related to abstract expressionism going on in New York, by something called the "action school." One of the shocks to me was the difference between the general feel of the whole school [and] what I was accustomed to seeing in art schools. Probably, even though I'd only been running the Jepson Art Institute for a short time, I still had this kind of a model in my mind of what an art school would be and what would go on in the various studios.

And at that time, many of the leaders--I think Clyfford Still may have been there and [Richard] Diebenkorn and people of that kind who continued to be leaders in their field--were the teachers that were involved there, and the thing that became immediately apparent to me was the kind of similarity that was going on in all of these studios. Even though [there was] a class where figure painting was going on and another class where, you know, traditionally they would classify it as a still-life painting class and so on, the work had a kind of quality of sameness. Much of the sameness even had to do with the size of the paintings they were working on; they were all still working within a certain size restriction. They hadn't gotten to the point where they were doing the enormous canvases that were going on later. There was an American in Paris who was painting the entire

sides of walls. I don't know if he would be exactly classed as an action painter, but I think the theme behind the painting was the Battle of Hastings. He was reliving by pretending to act out the Battle of Hastings through all these actions in which the brush was used like a sword and so on; he was dressed in a kind of goofy pseudomilitary outfit. All this was reported, I think, in Life magazine.

The San Francisco school, at least as far as the art school was concerned at that time, were all still working on conventional-size canvases about 30 x 40 [inches], which seemed to fit the storage racks that they had there. It was a traditional limitation. Later they moved out to the point where they were equating the size of the canvas with themselves in the sense that they felt that they were trying to feel an identity with the size of the canvas to really almost get into the canvas and work and so on. But it made me aware that in terms of the mood and the style of the period, that Los Angeles was really way behind this kind of a movement; there wasn't much of that going on in Los Angeles.

ROGERS: Are you talking 1947-48?

JEPSON: Yes, it was very soon after I started to take in GI students, and I went up there to discuss the problems of working with the government, contracts and

so on, with the other schools. As I think I mentioned earlier in the tape, I was a member of the California Association of Private Schools, and that's why I went up there at the time. But [as to] the questions of differences: I mentioned that when I had been in Paris three years ago and walked into the [shows]--in Europe, actually, not just in Paris--I did see some things that I recognized had come from Southern California. In Amsterdam, in particular, I went into a contemporary exhibition of work there, and I would say almost a third of it was Los Angeles artists. I don't know whether it had too much to do with my deciding to go there or not, but William Levitt was having a one-man show at a small gallery, kind of an avant-garde gallery in town, and I wanted to see that. I had--it was as much a coincidence as anything else--been to, I think, every one-man show he'd had up to that point.

I think I first saw one of his shows on La Cienega and one at Pomona College that was conducted by a young woman that I know very well. She was, I think, instrumental in introducing a lot of the more avant-garde artists in Southern California; they showed there at Pomona College before they showed anywhere else. She was so much out of step, I would say, with the traditional academic system there, they finally got her to leave. I

don't know whether they fired her or not, but she is now very successful in running galleries in New York. Her name was Helene Winner. And she has conducted exhibitions for New York State in Albany and, as I said, is now in charge of some large exhibition in New York City.

ROGERS: How did the Los Angeles art come to be shown in Amsterdam? Was this an Amsterdam dealer?

JEPSON: No, they have a contemporary art museum there, and they're quite progressive, and they were showing all the latest things that were going on. And how these contacts were made, I wouldn't know for sure, but I think a good many Southern Californians have been showing throughout Europe due to contacts that they got somehow through dealers here who have connections in New York and the European market. A good many of them have shown in Germany. Germany seems to be a very good market for contemporary art, and they seem to be financially more successful with their shows there than any other place.

In London, I saw a show by Jack Goldstein, who was one of my students, in a gallery that had, at one time, been run by Helene Winner. She had worked there a year in that gallery before she came west to work at Pomona. So she had arranged for that show for him, and then through that, I think he got a show in Milan of his work. He also had a one-man show at Pomona. It was probably

his first real public show. I want to correct part of that statement. It would seem to me, as I think back on it now, that the contact came through Claire Copley and a woman who originally had planned to have an avant-garde gallery in Los Angeles, seemingly because this young woman--I can't remember her name exactly--had a famous father who had a whole chain of galleries in Europe which dealt primarily with old masterworks. She felt the need of a contemporary gallery, and she wanted to start one, and evidently he was willing to back her at any place that she might wish to start one. Her first choice was Los Angeles, but the joint venture with Claire Copley didn't work out, and she started this gallery in Milan. And that was the contact which Jack Goldstein had which allowed him to have his first exhibition there. Like a lot of those European shows, it was to advantage to Jack, but at the same time, it didn't really pay in much more than his expenses of traveling there with the show. Oh, I think there were some other benefits which had to do with establishing a permanent record and so on, but there wasn't much that he gained in terms of income from that exhibition. However, I do think it was instrumental in helping him to get a grant from the Canadian government. Jack Goldstein was born in Canada, and I think he is still a Canadian citizen, even though

he went through school in Southern California and went to Chouinard Art Institute.

This kind of contact seemed to be very prevalent now. I don't know whether it had to do with the changing kind of ease of transportation or whatever, but it seems to exceed any other period in terms of exposure throughout the world. A good many of these people are showing not only in Europe, but they're showing in Japan and places of that kind, which is something that never happened in Southern California to any great extent before. There are, of course, local artists who have been established for a long time who have shown in such places, but there seemed to be a great surge of interest in California art and Los Angeles art during the sixties, which was something of a phenomena because I found in traveling in Europe and talking to people that they were very impressed by Southern California. They knew about the Los Angeles scene, and they knew about Venice and places like that. And I recall talking to a dealer in London who had Jack Goldstein's show there, and his attitude was, "Why do you want to come to London? Los Angeles is the place now."

So this idea of a kind of center
These things shift around. Certainly, the center of the contemporary art world is no longer Paris and probably

is shifting away from London. And it is going to places like Amsterdam or, I think, Düsseldorf or some such place in Germany where there's more active interest in contemporary art. Whether or not this is reflected in the schools or not, I think that Amsterdam and the There's a suburb very close to there [with a] sort of world-famous art school [Staatliche Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf]. Joseph Beuys was the teacher there, and he is sort of a spokesman for the avant-garde group now. He was a disaster in terms of this school because, as many of these kinds of people do, he created a kind of revolution; he seemed to be more interested in revolution than students. And I would say these kind of people seem to call attention to themselves by getting student followers who will revolt and so on.

Locally, we've had some of these same kind of people who have created innovations in their own work, but as colleagues or teachers in schools they have a way of somehow antagonizing the authority in the administration. I know of several cases where he had been brought into the school with some effort on the part of the administration and then he turns on them and embarrasses them and so on. I don't know, it seems to be a part of his nature to cause trouble, so he is constantly changing from one job to another. He's had some good jobs, but

he can't seem to hang in there long enough to get tenure because it just isn't in his makeup to be satisfied with what he can do within the classroom situation; he has to somehow get involved in politics. He has not only been thrown out of a lot of schools, he's been thrown out of different countries in South America and so on. [laughter]

ROGERS: Who are we talking about?

JEPSON: There, again [tape recorder turned off]
Connor Everts is the man I'm talking about, and I think the last word was that he was out at Riverside and is now headed for a job in the Midwest somewhere in an art school that's very famous. I can't think of the name of it. (He probably has mentioned it in his own tapes; I'm not sure.) [Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan] But he had so many assignments and somehow manages--because he's a very popular teacher with the students--to get them stirred up, and he uses this as a means of sort of In direct proportion to his popularity with students, as this increases, he seems to increase his attacks on the powers that be--you know, the status quo. And it doesn't seem very prudent, that's all; he just isn't that kind of a guy. He's entertaining, and he's very articulate and a lot of fun, but, you know, he cuts off his own nose to spite his face, I think, in

so many instances.

ROGERS: What is your assessment of his art?

JEPSON: Well, his contribution has never found a wide acceptance. Probably his greatest claim to fame was the fact that he was arrested for having an exhibition that the police thought was pornographic or something on La Cienega which, in looking back now, was a very mild show; [it] really wasn't I don't know why they managed that. But, anyway, he was the first, I guess, in Southern California and maybe the West and, perhaps, one of the first in the country to have himself arrested by the police for showing his work. It was mostly an exhibition of drawings that he had made. He's been arrested on occasions, mainly because he has such a sharp, nasty tongue; he can be so sarcastic, and this has been a detriment to some extent. One occasion he was with a gathering of students in a bar after an exhibition at the university where he was teaching, California State University in Long Beach, and the police came in, and he, you know, right away started to needle them, and so he ended up getting arrested. And then in the elevator on the way up to the being booked in the police station, they beat him so badly that he was hospitalized. And he was in handcuffs, and they accused him of trying to escape or something. They beat him on the legs with their

sticks until he was black and blue. But that is, I think, symptomatic of his kind of contempt for authority no matter who they are. And he's sharp; he's intelligent and bright, and this is devastating when you're attacking some of these knuckleheads. You know, an ordinary cluck who is a policeman, he doesn't know how to cope with that, I suppose, in any other way than to assert his authority with a stick. [laughter] I assess Connor Everts's contribution to the community mainly as a teacher more than through his work. Although he's competent and there's quality in the work he does, I think his greatest contribution would be as a teacher. He taught at the Chouinard school for a while, and he seemed to have the capacity to get the students really fired up and excited about what they were doing and to get them to believe that they were engaged in something that was sort of world-shaking, which I think is excellent, marvelous, you know; he's certainly not a dull teacher, and he has real capacity in this direction above all other.

One kind of story that's amusing enough: he had an idea that he would have the students build an environment for making drawings, the idea [being] that the environment would affect the drawing, and if they built their own environment and were working within this environment, that somehow this would contribute to the character of the

drawings that they would make. He got them so wrapped up in making environments that they were at loggerheads with the cleanup department. These structures that they were making were interfering with the sweeping of the floors, etc.--the usual thing when you have a run-in with janitors--and [the janitors] had gone to the administration to complain about it. Anyway, as a consequence, instead of adjusting to the needs of the policing up of the place, they--I think with Connor's urging--decided to do even more. They continued to the extent that they completely blocked the doorways with their structures, and then the class all climbed out through the skylight and went out down through the stairs that went up to the top of the roof and got out of it that way. [laughter] But that's just typical of Connor. [laughter] From the fun they had, I think they were delighted with that achievement much more than in the works that were produced.

ROGERS: Did you see the works that were produced? Was there something new?

JEPSON: No, I don't think they ever got past building the environment; they didn't do any drawings in the environment. Johnny Canavier had students making environments that seemed to take up pretty much the whole shop, and because his class was called Methods and Materials,

he didn't seem to have any run-in with janitors. I think he had some prior arrangement whereby he had student assistants taking care of the cleanup in that area because the tools were there and so on. And the janitors stayed out of there. Watson Cross had students building environments; and they were drawing and painting on and within the environments in one of the largest studios, but the studio was so large that they were just using various corners and sides of the place, and that didn't bother anybody particularly.

But thinking in terms of the idea of revolution, a kind of revolution which might symbolically change the environment seems to be taking place all of the time. To some extent, there is this kind of thing, an under-current, a kind of rebellion against the authority of the past that's reflected in all kinds of studies, not just in the arts. Where this will go, whether it will get past just a kind of negative obstruction of the norm--whatever that may be--or whether it becomes a new direction, really develops into something bigger, is hard to foresee. I don't think that anyone in the center of change is ever really able to assess what meaning it will have in the future. It may die out and mean nothing at all. It's quite evident over the past fifty years as I see what happened in Los Angeles. So history, being such

a thing, it's hard for anybody involved at the time, even after having been in it as long as I have. I can say I think there is a dramatic change that we're undergoing. I think it's characteristic of the time and particularly of Southern California, but this has always been so here. It always seemed that Southern California has attracted people that are a little more adventurous because they come here from other places. I think on the whole many of them have already moved two or three times from other places before they finally land here. But in spite of this adventurousness of the people moving here, it never has seemed to have that much effect on anything of any substance, let's say, on the art of the community or anything of that kind.

So it's a little hard to say what will happen. Certainly, when there is this exaggerated change, some of it's as much a kind of decay as a kind of renewal, and it seems to be a kind of a race between these two almost opposing directions. And then there's always the kind of establishment that always tries to keep the status quo going and hanging on pretty much. As far as the educational community is concerned, it's pretty much under the control of an entrenched group who has power in Sacramento, although they have lost a little bit of it with a new governor [Edmund G. Brown, Jr.], but

whether there will ever be a kind of revolution in that which seems to me is very much needed

Certainly there is something very wrong with traditional education. I think I mentioned to you just as you were leaving the other day, that I had a book called The Myth of the Hyperactive Child [Peter Schrag], and it's kind of terrifying to read that book, to read the diagnosis and the kind of treatment that's being given to a great majority of The students in the schools are being treated as if they had some kind of disease: this assessment that certain students have learning disabilities due to some kind of medical cause that can't be determined. Children who are unable to adapt to that unnatural way of separating thought from feeling and action are treated as if they needed some kind of remedial training, as if there was something wrong with them. In this book, The Myth of the Hyperactive Child, he mentioned that over 50 percent of parents feel that their children are too active. And I think 52, 54 percent of the boys are rated as too active, and some 40 percent of the girls are also called too active. So even the parents seem to accept the idea that this is the cause of their learning disabilities, and I think that until there is a developmental role for an active education--in the arts in particular--until this takes hold as

having a lot to do with the growth and development of normal behavior, until they build on these strengths, the kind of enthusiasm and the activity What this criticism of children really amounts to is [they are] annoying to adults; [there isn't] really anything wrong with the children. It bothers adults and in this way it's disturbing and upsetting unless you have very calm nerves--and a lot of parents haven't. It would seem to me that many of these students have a potential that isn't being built on at all. Where a child is very high in sensory motor acuity, for example, instead of building on this, they try to suppress this natural aspect of their natures in order to make them conform to this deleterious unnatural habit of separating thought from feeling and action.

This doesn't mean that people shouldn't learn to read, but reading and things of that kind which don't include the whole person require them to sit still like conditioned robots, and to make that a priority is a great mistake.

So in any case, it seems to me that the idea that hyperactive children are predelinquents because they don't conform to what's considered to be a norm in a kind of passive, detached education seems to be a great mistake, and certainly it's beginning to backfire,

because there's a great crisis in education and an increase in crime and antisocial behavior among students who seem to be increasingly rebellious. One educator refers to it as a kind of avalanche of delinquencies in schools and so on. But in an effort to remedy this situation, they just increase the pressures to conform to the same faulty system. As I think I made some mention before, it's a kind of "like-cures-like" effort. The thing that caused the ailment in the first place is now being used to try to cure it; however, they don't seem to see it that way. Can we stop a minute? [tape recorder turned off]

ROGERS: You commented that the artist is really reflective of his local community and the wider community that he lives in and the region that he lives in. Do you think that Los Angeles is influenced from even a wider area than just the local scene? Are there more influences from the East? the Oriental? Are there any influences from New York or Europe? And which do you feel are the strongest?

JEPSON: Well, there's a strange kind of influence. It isn't the kind of influence that would come from direct contact. It's the influence that comes from publications; most everything is book-size. Somehow, the world is seen in these terms, where in the past

this was a rare thing. As I remember as a student, it was very difficult to get good reproductions; it wasn't until they started to make art books larger and to make them easier to buy, less expensive and so on. But the things that we did see as students that had an impact--as I think back on them--were the things that we saw live. To see them on the wall and to go up close enough to be able to touch it and so on seems to be very important. This other influence, the influence of books, and I suppose the television--anything that's book-size, small size, the reduction and the superficiality of the reproduction is reflected, I think, by a response that I heard one time [when] I went to a gallery opening--Frank Perls's gallery of [Rufino] Tamayo's work, a Mexican painter. The place was packed--it was a very popular show--and on two or three occasions there, I heard people comment on how dirty the color looked and how dull the color was, that they were disappointed because it didn't look like the reproductions. Color reproductions invariably jazz up the color and are not consistent with either the color or the quality of the material with which it's painted and so on. And this kind of detachment of the printed picture seems to have a very strong effect on California art.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, SIDE TWO

JULY 8, 1976

JEPSON: This allows artists to accept a kind of superficial response to superficial reproductions or superficial images of various kinds. So we see the use of photographs being used more and more, and copying of the cheapest kind of reproductions and things of that nature as being sufficient. Differences that used to mean a great deal no longer mean very much.

I think an example of this kind of curious thing that goes on [is] that administrations are inclined to ignore or to pay very little attention to the environment into which they place students. I think the most recent example of this is the new Art Center College [of Design] that was moved to Pasadena. It's obviously designed by an engineer without consulting the artists who teach there or the students or anybody else, really. It's a terribly impractical building, even impractical from just the sanitary standpoint because of the location of restrooms and the limitations in sizes and so on, but the entire building is surfaced with white formica, and students and teachers are forbidden to stick anything into those walls. It provides a sterile environment that's comparable to the kind of environment

that I mentioned, I think, in the very beginning. I mentioned an experiment in sensory deprivation with rats where they put one group of rats from a litter in a sterile environment, and the other group is put in a stimulating, rich, lively environment where there's chances for the rats to explore and manipulate the environment. This effect of the sterile environment on the development of the brain cells is quite clearly demonstrated through this experiment.

So we have an art school here being placed in this sterile kind of empty environment, which I think is kind of tragic. John Lilly, one of the early investigators in sensory deprivation, and his wife, Tony (who was a student of mine at Chouinard), disagree and continue to experiment with water tanks in a soundless room. It's almost like putting [the students of the Art Center] in isolation of some kind, in cells that have no outside light or no outside air possible to come in. However, Lilly seems to think that some sort of transcendental insight may come from the experience. The outdoors is completely excluded. Chances to do anything within the environment that would reflect in any way what was going on there and so on seems to be a characteristic of a kind of mindless concern about the effects of a decreased variation in sensory environment on the artist

himself.

One time we had a new director [at Chouinard]; he was a good one--at least from my view he was a good one; the Disney corporation seemed to have a different opinion of him because he didn't raise much money. His name was Mitch Wilder. The head of the drawing department had requested that they buy some new skeletons because the old skeletons had deteriorated or broken apart, and the students had carried off pieces of it and so on. This was for the classes in figure drawing. So he ordered some new skeletons, but they were plastic reproductions. I was teaching a figure drawing class, and, although I didn't make too much use of the skeletons, nevertheless, after these things arrived, I felt it was necessary to complain a little bit to Mitch--although he was always very cooperative with me and everything. I said, "Why did you buy these imitations? You can buy the real thing. You can buy real skeletons from Mexico or India or places of that kind (where the skeletons come from) for the same price? Why did you buy these?" He said, "Well, this is copied from a perfect model, a perfect sample, and you can hardly tell the difference." And I said, "Well, I thought that one of the things about an art school was that it was set up to teach people the difference between the real and the fake." [laughter]

But it seems that this willingness to accept the imitation, and even to sort of glorify it, seems to characterize the things that the artists do and what they use and so on; it seems it certainly has a very definite effect.

And I think it's a great shortcoming of the locality here that we don't have a chance to see these things alive, to see them in reality, to experience the real thing. Galleries become more and more restrictive and more and more exclusive, and they show fewer and fewer things because it's classier to show them off, not to crowd them, jam them up the way they used to do--they would pile one on top of another, put paintings three high and so on. But it would seem that this is one of our great shortcomings. When they do have contemporary shows, they're only open for brief periods, and then they are forced to be taken down and so on. The galleries that we do have are sort of spread out; especially the public galleries are so far apart, so unrelated to areas where artists usually congregate, except on very special occasions. Even the choice of plastics and things of that kind were so popular--at least in the sixties; it's sort of died out now--this all seems part of a kind of a lack of sensitivity to the world around us. Whether this can be blamed on the automobile--or what could it be

blamed on? It just seems to be general. But that kind of detachment seems to be characteristic of Southern California, the California environment. So it's quite remarkable when anything happens of any great significance. It does seem that there are brief times--like for instance the congregation of artists in Venice. When they started to go down there, rents were cheap, and a lot of them, like Californians do, they loved the ocean. I think at least half of them were surfers, and they could go surfing at the beach, and they could go back and work and so on. I don't know what that means exactly, but it probably has something to do with the kind of breadth. And there is certainly a kind of simplicity, in general, in the work that might be classed as Californian, and probably as Southern California--having to do with Los Angeles, particularly that part which has to do with Venice--because anyone living near the ocean, the expanse of that ocean, the broad horizon and the great expanses of sand and all that sort of thing, can certainly have some kind of influence. And this is seen in works of, I would say, Bob Irwin, Larry Bell, and the Dill brothers, Laddie and Guy, in particular.

ROGERS: Artists who have come to work in California have mentioned that the brilliancy of the sunshine has been hard to adapt to. Do you believe that a California

light exists and can be detectable in the works of the Californian artist?

JEPSON: Well, these differences--of course, they're dramatic. If anyone comes from the East in the winter-time, where it's barren and it's cold and everything and the green disappears and so on--all the green leaves and the grass turns brown and so on; the ground freezes--they come in, and of course they are surprised by the brilliance of the color. I think anyone is sensitive to these differences. When you go from Los Angeles to the desert someplace, like Palm Springs--where you get away temporarily from most of the smog--all of a sudden Palm Springs is the place where the color is the brightest. And even though it is largely desert, the greys seem brighter and more brilliant. The color, even the subtle colors, are more vibrant and more alive. So I think in the long term these are things we adjust to and adapt to, and they don't make so much difference after a while.

I noticed that people like Londoners, for example: because the majority of their days are clouded over there, when the sun comes out, all of a sudden everybody gets out in the park, tries to get a little of that sun. They start taking their shirts off and try to get the sunshine for a very brief period. And yet, it seems if that lasts very long, then suddenly they start getting

irritable about it. It's like we are when we get a bad one out here; it rains for a couple of weeks without stopping, and then suddenly I hear people complaining. Well, over there they complain about the sunshine, and I suspect that much of this heat wave that we hear about isn't quite as bad as they make out. It's a typical response of people who are not used to such heat. I don't know; it may be bad, but I kind of suspect that differences that people feel in localities seem to be a very subtle, very subjective thing. And I don't know to what extent it lasts; I don't know how much meaning that would have in the long term.

ROGERS: In mixing colors, wouldn't it have an effect?

JEPSON: Well, if there was the kind of thing going on where people were concerned with such matters, but the influence of impressionism has long left Southern California's painters' work. There are some that are still working who went through a kind of period where they were concerned with light, color, things of that kind, but [it was] in a period where they, you know, take the color out of the can pretty much as it's given, without any thought or concern about color relationships, quality of color and differences in color and the times of day and things of that kind. That seems to mean something, but color doesn't seem to be a particular concern.

ROGERS: How strong has the Mexican influence been?

JEPSON: Oh, I think the influence of Mexican art was very strong in the art schools in the thirties because it was strong throughout the country. That was the movement that seemed to have some power and strength to it way beyond anything that was going on here--the American scene painting and things of that kind; the kind of art that sort of reflected a kind of isolationism and so on didn't amount to as much. Consequently, the innovative movement in the Western Hemisphere was in Mexico City, and consequently there was a strong tendency to bring those influences in here, even by bringing the artists themselves into California. [José Clemente] Orozco was brought here [1930] to paint the [Prometheus] mural in [Frary Hall] Pomona [College, Claremont]. And about the same time [David] Siqueiros came and taught at Chouinard. And there were a couple of painters--Jean Charlot was a Mexican painter, French name, and I think he had a French father and a Mexican mother. And he was actually trained in Paris, France, but nevertheless, he was one of the more articulate Mexican spokesmen. He came and taught at Chouinard. Earlier in this period, there was another Mexican painter who taught around 1930, 1929, at Chouinard, but I can't think of his name. That was the movement that was looked to by California artists, and

I thought it was rather amusing that one, Richards Ruben, in one of his exhibitions, referred to the work that he was doing as a student at Chouinard as--he didn't refer to having ever been to art school or, as far as I know, ever mentioned any schooling, but he referred to the work that he did which he had in a retrospective as his Mexican period.

ROGERS: How would you characterize it?

JEPSON: Mexican? I think it's fantastic in the sense that it was very Mexican, and Americans just couldn't cope with the kind of vitality, the kind of virility that was in their work. Unsurpassed, I think, and belongs to Mexico, and is a part of Mexico. [Along] with that, the experimentation with new materials and new methods and new tools and new ways of looking at the act of painting and what it was about and so on was quite a revolution.

ROGERS: Did these new materials and paints and methods come with them when they taught at Chouinard?

JEPSON: Siqueiros was the only one, as I recall, that did anything different, and I may have mentioned he painted a mural on the back wall of the inner patio which was essentially an attempt to use a traditional technique of fresco painting on wet plaster. But as I said, he used a spray gun, and the color all but washed

off, so that the only innovation there was the use of the mechanical thing like the spray gun, which he had experimented with in other ways, using acrylics on some of the murals that he did in Mexico City.

I think at one time, Siqueiros and Orozco had challenged each other to a duel, and I don't know who was challenging who, but both of them were known to carry guns around stuck in their belts--it was part of their image. Anyway, the person who was challenged--which one it was I don't recall now--said, "Okay, I get a right to choose my own weapons," and he decided that they would use spray guns and fight the duel with spray guns.

[laughter] They were great showmen. But certainly I think I view that as a great movement in Mexico. It certainly has to do with Mexico. It's Mexican color, Mexican characters revealed in that; it's typically Mexican, very much. I think it's a great movement. I don't think that it had much to offer to the rest of the world, particularly.

ROGERS: If the plastic infiltration and the artificiality of the modern, technological world that Angelenos are living in now has had some adverse effects, hasn't the introduction of new media also brought on some exciting new projects that can be termed as fine art?

JEPSON: Well, certainly they're presented as such.

Whether they will have any lasting significance, I don't know, I have a feeling that they are of minor significance. The more traditional forms of art expression, the different materials that were used, had qualities and characteristics that are closer to the kind of total needs of an artist. That's probably why they have lasted so long. Essentially, they are very simple: the need for something that can be easily manipulated, that you can explore with, that is possible of various kinds of extensions, that doesn't impose too many limitations and restrictions on the artist or the things that seem to have a lasting importance to the artist. Most of these newer techniques certainly have characteristics which are unique to the material; they are not like other materials used before. But most of them seem to lack a kind of flexibility that would be most useful to an artist.

To come back to Lebrun, Lebrun got the idea of working with a different material other than an oil paint, for example, so he started to paint with quick-drying lacquers and increased the tempo of his work. And this he got from the Mexican school, and this is a direct influence of a young man who was, I think, from Czechoslovakia. He had been a GI during World War II, and, as you know, foreigners who enlisted in the American army during World War II were then automatically given

citizenship for fighting for the U.S. So he was one of those and had, I think, been through some training here on the GI Bill. He may have been in this country at the time the war started, I don't know. But he came up and gave a lecture in my school. I got him to come, and I don't know how or what the occasion was. I think he just came into the office one day and introduced himself and said that he would like to talk about the materials that the Mexican artists were using now, because he was living and teaching there at San Miguel, in the art school there. And it just happened that Lebrun had his class that day. And I talked to Lebrun about it, and he said fine, [and that] he'd like to have him talk to his class. And then they became good friends, and he was responsible for introducing this lacquer medium to Lebrun and also at a later date to getting Lebrun to go back down to San Miguel, Mexico, with him for a couple of years. In any case, the introduction to the material came at the time earlier, around 1949 or 1950.

I have failed to mention Ron Cooper, one of my former students at Chouinard in the sixties, who made some very large paintings with acrylics which were very well accepted everywhere. But this whole movement towards the acceptance of these new commercial materials started in Mexico, so it seems to me. And that was, I think, a more lasting influence, more than the character

of the kind of work that they were doing, which was, as you know, highly influenced by their history and their background, going clear back to the Aztec times and so on. In any case, that was the movement that seemed to have the most force in the Western world in the thirties from my point of view, and it affected education, too, at least locally because, as I recall, it caused at least a couple of the teachers at Chouinard to sort of turn around in their ways of thinking about drawing and painting and things of that kind because Jean Charlot taught at Chouinard for a couple of different semesters. When he was teaching--I wasn't around at the time; that was during the early part of the thirties, [and] I was out doing commercial work and so on--Don Graham, who was the head of the faculty, went to the classes and studied with this Mexican painter, Jean Charlot; and Don Graham was really turned around in his way of teaching and the kind of images that he was developing himself and so on.

So the Mexican influence was here, especially at the Chouinard Art Institute. I don't think it had the effect on the other two main art schools. The Art Center School of Design is, and was then, primarily directed toward commercial art, advertising, and things of that kind. And the Otis Art Institute, being a public school, seemed to not be as flexible in their ability to hire

new teachers and so on, which would be required to bring people in from the outside like the Mexicans.

ROGERS: You've had some experience working with polyurethane. Did you find it limiting?

JEPSON: It has certain qualities and characteristics which are You know, this kind of paint is great for painting an automobile. If you want a very polished finish--that's what I used it for, to unify the surface more than anything, and the color I chose was quite arbitrary. It was just one color usually.

ROGERS: What about molded resins?

JEPSON: This was very much in vogue, and I think that the fact that [DeWain] Valentine and [Peter] Alexander were doing this work and required a lot of help to do it in which they recruited the young students mainly from Chouinard school, this brought a lot of those young fellows together. And the kind of contact they had with people who were already involved as they were with the galleries and so on helped them make a transition from art school into the galleries themselves. Practically all those who have made it on the international scene worked as assistants in these studios.

I think that I should point out that the dangers of these new materials wasn't really understood or accepted by the art students, and in general they were very careless.

I've known several who are still working with this material who are very careless about using this highly volatile material. It's very damaging to the lungs and perhaps a cause of cancer and so on. I have always felt that it might have had--and we never know what the real cause of cancer is--but it might have had a very strong effect on Lebrun's getting cancer, because when he came back from Mexico he was using another different technique that he had, working with these plastics, in which he was mixing the paint himself. He would get these crystals and mix the solvent and then mix those with dry color, and that was the way he painted that mural at Pomona College. And that being so highly volatile was just a kind of continuation of using the same kind of material. Lacquers are the same thing. He had a studio down on Adams Street or someplace in which he had a fan at the front and one at the back to bring in fresh air and one to blow it out the front door. But it was just in a store building, and anyone who knows about industrial pollution and things of that kind within a manufacturing plant knows that that's not an adequate place in which to work with such volatile materials. This requires a tremendously large fan and a booth that's quite small and has specific kind of openings and is highly regulated by law because of this danger. But he

worked there in this one studio, and I went in there, and that air was so thick with fumes that you just can't believe it, it was so bad.

Being an artist working day after day with these materials is a very, very dangerous occupation. And I had enough experience with it, and in my own studio I tried to do the best I could to build a booth and to use the proper fans and the proper two-and-a-half-horsepower motor on there and so on. But I still didn't conform to the building safety regulations for such things. And I found that even though I was running the machine, that I was getting too many fumes, not so much from when I was using a paint sprayer putting on the paint as when I was working with a steam bender that I had. I began to realize what had happened to me. I was really sniffing the glue, the glue that was already in this laminated plywood evaporating and giving me a headache and so on, and so I got rid of the thing that day. I sent it off to the dump. It had cost me quite a bit to have it made--designed it and built it and everything--but I thought, "That's not for me."

ROGERS: I hope to talk more about your own work with plywood when we make the video tape, and so we can get into some of the mechanics and problems that you had exploring new ways to work with old media. With the

use of the new materials, how do you make a valid art judgment on avant-garde art? What is bad art?

JEPSON: Well, when I think about art, I think about the artist and his involvement and his commitment, that somehow the art itself is merely a track of where he's been. And this reflects the man who did it. The validity, I think, is in the degree of involvement or intensity that seems to be reflected in the final work. It's like the difference to be seen in the work of children. It may be childlike or childish, let's say, in a sense of the kind of images they make, but the kind of single-minded intensity that goes into it gives it that kind of impact that is equal to, or often better than, work done by adults. It isn't mature--it's still a child's work--but nevertheless, it's this same kind of thing that I expect to find in works that I feel have real quality. It's where that kind of sustained intensity seems to be reflected in the works which are in a sense just the tracks of where the artist has been, and it's the process that concerns me. And somehow this always seems to manage to come through. People are capable of mimicking other men's works, particularly works of the new medium, ceramics and things of that kind which can be impersonal. The final work and the character of the medium and so on has certain impersonal qualities that

are characteristic of that medium that are always there and are very much alike, so that a high fire of certain color on ceramic, a certain kind of pigment that they use, the glazes they use, are pretty much the same. They are brought up to a certain firing and so on, and this allows for a kind of similarity, and the difference becomes even more subtle with the new materials. Differences become less easy to identify. Nevertheless, there are people who, no matter what they lay their hand to, somehow leave their tracks on that thing, and it's there; it's very much in evidence. The kind of choices they make, what they decide to do, somehow comes through. So what I look to is that quality which becomes more and more obscure with some of these new materials. It is very difficult to distinguish between them, and especially when artists themselves are unconcerned about their own individuality, and are perfectly willing to leave doing the work to assistants and so on. It becomes more and more difficult to perceive that kind of quality. But the difference, somehow, with an artist of any real power, the strength seems to come through.

ROGERS: When we make your video tape, Mr. Jepson, we'll be discussing your activities, since you have discontinued teaching--at least temporarily. Perhaps you'd like to bring us up-to-date on the circumstances of your

leaving Chouinard and the moving of the school. The merging we've already discussed, but how did you fit into those closing days?

JEPSON: Well, I think that in general, we were able to see the handwriting on the wall before the actual closing down of the school. There was a good deal of comment, and we had meetings of the board and things about the general directions that things were taking. For the most part, I think we recognized that what they were doing was using the school and its accreditation to gain funds to start a new school, which was going to be turned over to a whole new crew with the idea of starting from scratch to build something entirely different than what had been there, even to the point of getting rid of the name Chouinard. Chouinard had been a name of importance, as far as education, throughout the country for a long time. The Chouinard Art Institute started about 1921 or '22, and by 1926, when I went there, someone or some group of some importance surveyed this school, and Chouinard was listed as one of the five more important art schools in the United States. In a general way, it maintained this kind of leadership through most of the time until the closing down of the school. And even the abandonment of the name seemed to be a great mistake. Just from the advertising point of view, it seemed that

So we knew that this was the handwriting on the wall; we were through as teachers there. And they only kept three teachers as a kind of token thing for a short time, who were employed as teachers at the school. I think it was [Matsumi] Kanemitsu and [tape recorder turned off] There were three teachers who were taken out there, but it was only a token thing, and they were soon dropped. There [was] one exception, Stephan Von Huene, a young man at Chouinard who was almost a beginner as a teacher. I think he is still there. But on the whole, they, I think, were attempting to wipe the thing clean. Taking three teachers was sort of a token effort to appease some of the board members and so on. So, in any case, there was no thought of taking old faculty members of this school. And I can't say that I didn't in some ways sympathize because I had long felt since that there was a tendency to avoid the introduction of new blood into the faculty system.

TAPE NUMBER: VII, [video session]

AUGUST 28, 1976

ROGERS: This is a beautiful spot, just a beautiful spot.

JEPSON: We've lived here for about twelve years now; we've had this place for twelve years. We actually don't live here all of the time. We just spend our time, most of the time, in the city, and we come here on weekends--except in the summer we like to spend more time here. On a clear day, you can see clear to Catalina, but, of course, we have a kind of a ground fog here right now. It's unfortunate we can't see more of it, but it's liable to clear off anytime now. That's one thing about living along the ocean here: it's always changing; it's always different. And there are always a lot of boats going by and things of that kind because we're so close to the harbor.

ROGERS: Why do they call it Portuguese Bend?

JEPSON: I think there were Portuguese fishermen who used to come down to the cove down that way. They used to come in there to get protection from the sea. That point out there makes a kind of a harbor in there for them.

ROGERS: Can you see Catalina when the fog is lifted?

JEPSON: Well, if it's a good, clear day, yes, you can see detail on the island. It's twenty-five miles out there, but you can see the detail on it, if it's a good, clear day--if there's enough wind to blow away the smog.

ROGERS: Is this one of your pieces, Herb?

JEPSON: Oh, yes, that's one I did in the early fifties as a kind of protest against the use of the atom bomb--the nuclear bomb--because at that time they were testing those bombs in the South Seas and there was some talk about using the bomb in the Korean War. And I was against the idea of them using the bomb. So I called it Fallout. After I'd carved it--or actually while I was carving it--I discovered it had a couple of little worms in it, and I decided that that was appropriate. I just let them stay in there, and over the years, over the past years--let's see, it's been almost twenty-five years now--the worms have just about taken over. So I think that's appropriate. It's a kind of a concept piece; it's one of my only concept pieces.

ROGERS: It's taken on a life of its own. It keeps changing all the time, doesn't it?

JEPSON: Yes, that's right.

ROGERS: I heard someone say, "Hi, sweetheart." Do we have a fifth member of the Jepson family here?

JEPSON: Oh, that's this myna bird. He talks a lot,

but if you usually ask him to do something on cue, he won't do it.

BIRD: Okay, darling.

JEPSON: Well, now he's talking. You can hear that plainly. Elena, see if you can get him to say something else.

ROGERS: Let me come over on this side of you, Elena. Can you make Mario talk?

ELENA JEPSON: Whatcha doing?

JEPSON: He won't talk on cue.

ELENA JEPSON: Want to go out?

JEPSON: He has a mind of his own. He really seldom parrots exactly what you'll say; he'll have something else to say, another comment to make.

ELENA JEPSON: Want to go out?

ROGERS: What kind of a bird is it?

JEPSON: He's a myna bird.

ROGERS: Steve, why don't you come in here and see if you can get him to say something. See if you can get him to perform.

STEPHEN JEPSON: Hello, Mario. How are you?

JEPSON: He's actually Stephen's bird. He says about, oh twenty-five words and phrases that he uses, and they often have kind of a logical sequence to them, but at this point he's not about to say

BIRD: Hi, Mario.

ROGERS: I hope everybody heard that. That's the perfect thing to say, Mario. The other day when I came in, he said, "Hi, sweetheart."

JEPSON: Oh, yes.

ROGERS: And then he called me a creep.

JEPSON: Yeah, well, "You're a creep, Mario. You're a creep."

BIRD: Oy vay!

JEPSON: That's Yiddish for "Good grief." [laughter]

ROGERS: Well, Mario, we're going to leave you to the sunshine, and you can enjoy it out here. We don't want to get upstaged by a bird, do we, Herb?

JEPSON: No.

ROGERS: Why don't we go in the house?

JEPSON: Okay.

* * *

JEPSON: Marcia and I have enjoyed being down here at the beach as a break away from the city, and yet I think we much prefer to be in the city. Is that right?

MRS. JEPSON: Yes, definitely.

JEPSON: We were thinking about the things you'd find down here. There's always so much to see. We enjoy sort of beachcombing and looking in the rocks. There's

so many varied formations in this area, and one of the things that we found was this fossil. Actually our son Stephen found it.

ROGERS: Have you analyzed the fossil at all? Do you have any idea where it's from? Marcia, you knew something about that, didn't you? What did Stephen say he thought that it was?

MRS. JEPSON: I don't know.

JEPSON: Well, I think it's a whale vertebra.

There are five vertebra there; I think there are five. At one time I tried to count them. And they tell me that this piece of rock that surrounds it is something like 3, 4 million years old--which is interesting, too. And then this piece here is a petrified log, a piece of a tree stump or something; of course, this piece outside of it is just a rock. But you can see the grain of this.

ROGERS: Well, you spend enough time down here so that you know the area very well, and you've been here a long time. We have one of Elena Canavier's prints over here on the mantle, don't we Marcia? Could you tell me a little bit about that?

MRS. JEPSON: It's a drawing of the tide pools [Tidepool], and she did that in 1964 when we first settled in this area. She's really well known for her ceramic sculpture. I like the drawing very much.

ROGERS: She's very involved in crafts now, isn't she?

MRS. JEPSON: She's head of the craft department for the National Endowment for the Arts.

ROGERS: I see. You have another piece that she did, too. Would you like to go and get it for me and bring it out so we can see it?

MRS. JEPSON: We have three or four pieces.

JEPSON: One of her better pieces, I think, is in our apartment up in the city. But she's been a longtime friend. Marcia and she were going through my school together when they met, and we've been friends ever since.

MRS. JEPSON: This is the tide-pool area also. It's one of her early so-called ceramic sculptures [from the tide pool series].

ROGERS: Maybe we can hold it here so that we can get a good shot of it.

JEPSON: I think it really doesn't show up too much, but I think it will be

ROGERS: She made this to represent the tide pools and the shapes and the colors that were in there?

JEPSON: I think the tide pools are motivation for the kind of things she's done. She never has followed it directly but is influenced by the tide pools.

MRS. JEPSON: Some of her glazes are rather unique--not in this particular piece, but later in her career, she

did some very unique glazes also related to the tide-pool motivation.

ROGERS: As a close association, shall we say, with a woman artist, which Marcia has been for many years You met her as a young artist, didn't you?

JEPSON: Yes, she was a student in my school.

ROGERS: And you have a lot of contact with women as artists. I'd be interested to know how you feel through the years they have been accepted and how they can stand on their own as working artists in today's society?

JEPSON: Well, I think many of the most outstanding students that I had were women, but they don't fare so well when they get out into the commercial world, for rather obvious reasons, I think. You know, people don't take them as seriously. Recently they have been paying more attention to the women artists, but on the whole they're treated not as just equals--they're treated as, well, as something rather unusual. Not as freaks exactly, but it's sort of a tokenism, I think, in general. Part of this seems to come from the kind of prejudice that they find in museum directors; the gallery directors and so on aren't usually women. And even when they are women, the women themselves are sort of prejudiced against other women artists. Although Marcia (under the name of Marcia Shlaudeman, her maiden name) had exhibitions in some

twenty-five museums and galleries in the United States and has work in permanent collections and so on, I still think that it's been an uphill battle for her. But as students, I found that some of the most dynamic, some of the most highly motivated people that I had, that I worked with, were women students. And I would have to say that I learned the most from them, because quite often they are difficult to teach, in a sense that they don't adapt as directly to instruction, the kind of how-to-do-it instruction--which is much to their advantage, I feel. I think much of my turnaround in my approach to teaching was due to the fact that I found that some of the most talented--not talented (I don't like the term)--but most outstanding students I had were women, but often they just seemed to be totally incapable of following exact, precise directions. And I realized, I think, that in spite of the fact that they didn't follow any kind of classroom premises or idea of a problem, for instance, what they did come up with was always the most exciting, the most meaningful out of the works being done--the most original and unique. So they, as students in general--among the faculty, you don't find them accepted as the stars, usually. I objected to that kind of thing, mainly when I As I mentioned previously in our previous tapings, Howard Warshaw seemed to be very

prejudiced against the women students. And I objected to this because I strongly felt that the people he picks as stars are followers, and he's very much a believer in following the master. If you don't accept him as a master, he has an idea that should follow some guiding authority.

ROGERS: If you took women and men paintings and just put them on a wall and, let's say, put numbers on them, would you be able to tell whether a man or a woman painted it? Or any kind of a piece--sculpture, ceramics?

JEPSON: Well, sometimes, but I don't know how much that . . . I really don't feel that there's that much difference.

There is a difference as there is differences between their personalities. But, in general, I would have to say that if, as Marcia did She, Marcia, sent works to competitions, particularly out of state and Northern California and San Francisco, places where she knew that people wouldn't know that she was my wife, because, you know, they wouldn't think in those terms. She wanted to be accepted for her work, not for any other reason. So many of the things she sent to those exhibitions, she just put "M. Shlaudeman" on them. She signed them as M. Shlaudeman so they wouldn't know that she was a woman, and her work was well accepted. Maybe that wouldn't have made a difference, but she kind of felt that it

might have some influence.

ROGERS: Well, since you have left teaching at Chouinard, that has given you an opportunity to do things in new directions. What did you do when you left Chouinard?

JEPSON: Well, when I realized that Chouinard was going to be closed down, I decided to set up my own studio and to start to work. I had decided then that I wouldn't try very hard to get another teaching job. I felt that I had done enough at that point. Consequently, I got a studio up on Seventh Street directly across from MacArthur Park and started to work in sculpture. And in doing that, I decided that what I wanted to do was to do

I was in a sense trying to practice what I had been preaching, and I wanted very much to come to the whole thing with a fresh eye, not to force it into some preconception of what I'd done before. I wanted to do something totally different than anything I had done before. So I picked the material in which I hadn't worked, in the sense that I had never formed plywood before, and I decided to do that. Although I'd worked with tools, of course, and even made some furniture, and I had designed tools, form blocks and things that they used in the aircraft industry for forming plywood, I had never done it myself, and I decided that that was what I was going to do. And in order to come to it with a fresh eye, I felt

that I needed to let the material tell me what to do. I initially started out with some ideas, some plans of the kind of things I might do, but that changed very rapidly when I began to work with the material because the material tended to fight back. And I felt that was really what I was most interested in, and so I worked with plywood there. I think I was there two years, maybe a little more, on Seventh Street, in that studio. And then I moved the studio downtown to, with--we had the studio jointly--Marcia. We had two floors there, a kind of upstairs, a kind of mezzanine or a partial area where Marcia had a studio. And then she wanted a bigger studio, so we moved out of there and got separate studios downtown in a building in which Jack Goldstein was working (he was going into filmmaking and wasn't too interested in his studio anymore). He had this big, entire second floor of an industrial building, and we leased part of that, which we kept until we went to England.

ROGERS: I see. This is one of your pieces here [untitled].

JEPSON: Yes.

ROGERS: Could you give us a little bit of an explanation how this was formed and how you were able to get the contours?

JEPSON: Well, one thing I did, I did something in this that might seem a little difficult; I dry-formed it.

That is, I did it by clamping it; I didn't steam-bend it or anything like that. So I just tried to allow the material to bend the way that would seem natural for it to bend, using the clamps and tools that I had for that purpose. I actually got into some steam-bending, but that seemed to be rather arbitrary. You can bend wood into most any form that you like with steam and by chemical injection (I've forgotten what they use, one of the common chemicals). And you could These chairs that we're sitting in, for instance, these are Eames chairs. This is part of the furniture we bought when we were first married, and these are, of course, commercial productions, but they You can see that by injecting a chemical into it and under steam, you can then bend wood into most any shape you like. So

ROGERS: Why did you paint it orange?

JEPSON: Well, I decided just to take a common color, not to have any fuss about it or that at all. I just take the color off of the color chart and painted it that color. That's enamel. That was part of what I was doing was just letting what material I had tell me what to do. These are actually This is just about slightly under four feet. I used a module--the plywood comes in those modules of 4 x 8 feet, and I decided arbitrarily to use that as a module. I cut

them kind of in half and one sheet of plywood They're just eighth-inch plywood, one piece on each side. The pieces you see in the side here, you can't see that they're separate, but the pieces are glued. That is a solid. That's not plywood, but both these surfaces are plywood.

ROGERS: There was a piece on the patio that we saw when we were out on the patio [untitled]. Now, that one you left in its natural finish, and you can see the grains of the wood that moved when you bent them, and they took on new forms.

JEPSON: That is one of the first ones that I did. I think that piece was actually done in 1969. And eventually, after going through this period where I painted them Part of the [reason for] the paint was that at the period when this all started, I found in forming it that in forcing the wood into these various shapes, I was putting dings in it and so on; so as carpenters say, "A little bit of putty and paint covers a multitude of sins."

[laughter] But that was partly the reason. I don't know, I had a lot of different ideas about the forms that these things would use and the kind of things that would go along with it. Actually that piece out there and several of them like it were I went through a period in which I had mounted them on a heavy steel

base and used springs so that they could be--if you bumped against them, they would move and swing, move.

ROGERS: Kinetic.

JEPSON: Yeah. So that they would have some kinetic And then I even experimented with the idea of introducing sound into the thing because, somehow, they suggested wind and the waves. I suppose that might have been influenced by what you get here when, for instance, at night the fog is in and you can hear the foghorns. So I decided that I would get one of these foghorns that are activated by simple movement: You know, they have a foghorn that they put way out at sea that is activated by the movement of the waves (it bellows and so forth). I had notions like that for a while, but I soon abandoned that because I realized that this would require maintenance and care and so on. I did some in which I worked with lights and transparent materials and things of that kind. But actually I found the most satisfaction in the first steps of simply forming the wood, and I decided that if there were virtue in the pieces, it was in those early moves. Consequently, some of the last things I did had no finish on them, except as a kind of--oh, I think I put a slight preservative on the wood, and maybe a little bit of stain to kill the rawness of it. But like that first piece, they were more in the character of the wood originally.

ROGERS: How long did you work with this project?

JEPSON: Oh, from 1969 until we went to England and I put all my tools in storage and sold some of the bigger power tools and things of that kind which I had.

ROGERS: What prompted your decision to leave the United States and go to England?

JEPSON: Well, I think it all relates to even the idea that I have about this material here, as far as I'm concerned; and the family, at least Marcia and Elena, were game to go. I think originally Elena just went along because we told her to, but she's sold on the idea now and after she was there a while. But we both felt a need for a change, that somehow my quitting--the Chouinard school closing down and my being out of a teaching job, my getting away from teaching--we decided that would be a good time to make a change. So, as I mentioned, the difficulty of coming to things with a fresh eye--and you have found in my discussions about art and art education and things of that kind that I believe that the energy we get from new experience and from being aware of change is vital to our needs for maintaining mental health. Anyway, that's the excuse we gave, and that's the excuse I give for going there.

And I would have to say that England--London, especially--did supply that because it was so new to me.

I had lived most of my life here in Southern California, and although I had been to Europe and been in big cities briefly on visits, this was the first time I had a chance to really understand the difference between a city and a place like Los Angeles, which is really not a city in those terms. Consequently, I've found that a very stimulating, very exciting experience--constantly new. Anyway, I think that I would like to go back because of that. It's a constant--of course, when you're at the ocean, it's constantly changing, too; but even the change, the fact in its change, there's still a kind of sameness to certain kinds of change. And I suppose a certain city might become that way to you; but in the meantime, right now for me around every corner, there's something different to see and something different to experience there.

And in addition, there is a wealth of research material which is part of what I wanted to do over there. I had an idea that I would continue the kind of hobby that I had in collecting these models of artists' works from the past. This has been a kind of reoccurring interest of mine for a long, long time. It's the thing that I've felt that I would pick up and do when I stopped teaching. So London offers more basic research material than perhaps any other place in the world.

ROGERS: Are these little statues that you have on your mantle some of the pieces that you have collected? Would you like to elaborate a little bit on these four large ones?

JEPSON: Well, those, I believe they're models for the Four Seasons, I think, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini. I've still got lots of research to do on that. And as a key to what they were, one of the problems I will have will be to try to find the enlarged bronzes that were made from the models. They have disappeared. Unquestionably, they're probably around, unless they were melted into cannonballs or something of that kind.

ROGERS: These are wood?

JEPSON: Yes, they're wood. And when I purchased them, I found in cleaning them that they had about four coats of paint. At one time they were painted in a kind of green bronze color, and then at one point they were a light bronze (I think you can see some of it still on the base here; they were that rather yellow bronze color). Then they were painted a dark green bronze, and then they were painted that kind of a black color. So actually they had four coats of paint on them, which kept you from seeing the detail on them. Now you can see that there are eyelids and lots of details in there that just weren't apparent. Things that small with all of that

paint on them: it's like a heavy glove over the form which disguised its real character.

ROGERS: They have a name, don't they?

JEPSON: They're Four Seasons (Spring, Summer, Fall and Winter).

ROGERS: And these two smaller ones in the middle, [Autumn and Winter], are those Bernini's also?

JEPSON: No, that's by François Giradon. He was a follower of Bernini's, a Frenchman who actually worked on the piece of sculpture that Bernini had done for the king of France--I can't think of which one it was exactly--but the king just didn't like Bernini's sculpture that he did of him (it was an equestrial sculpture of him on a horse), and he put it in the back of the garden at Versailles or someplace like that and then had François Giradon modify and alter it. But Giradon was sort of a French follower. As you know, Bernini influenced the entire seventeenth-century sculpture probably more than any one man.

ROGERS: You said that you did a lot of research on Bernini. Where in London were you able to this information?

JEPSON: Well, you know they have marvelous libraries. The Conway Library, and then the Victoria and Albert Museum Library, and then the Royal Library, the library in the--I think it is near the big museum there, the

British Museum. It's incredible. They have every book on art that's ever been published. The thing that I found, particularly in the Victoria and Albert, was that they were so informal about the whole thing, so efficient in getting the books you wanted, and so helpful, that it just was marvelous, just marvelous. The bigger libraries, like some of those in New York, like the Morgan Library, are very stuffy about letting you even use the library. You have to go through a lot of technical folderol and so on. In London, I think at the Victoria and Albert you were supposed to have some kind of a card or a pass, but they never bothered to ask for it. So in all the time, in the year I was there, I never bothered to get one, and I spent so much time there that they got to know me, so no one ever asked. The guards, they'd always say hello in the morning, and that's about it; they're very informal about those things.

ROGERS: Did you research anybody else besides Bernini while you were there, or have you been looking up other things?

JEPSON: Oh, yes. I sort of haunted the auction galleries and was constantly looking for bargains.

ROGERS: Are these pieces that we have on the wall over here, are they some of your finds in the auctions and antique shops?

JEPSON: Yes, the Eugène Delacroix [Descent from the Cross], and then this

ROGERS: Perhaps we could walk over there a little bit, and you could tell me a little bit about them.

* * *

JEPSON: This painting was one that I bought in an auction in London. Of course, when I bought it, it was covered with, oh, varnish and so on and had practically no color visible at all. I had this cleaned by a famous restorer there in London. I sort of conned him into doing it for me in a rather brief period by telling him I was leaving London, so he cleaned it for me. And as I bought it as a Delacroix--when you buy things of that nature in those galleries, if they don't put the artist's first name in it, that means that they don't guarantee that it's a Delacroix. The general way is that in using his name, that means that could be school of Delacroix. But I'm quite convinced that that is an original because of its size, the character of the paint, the figures and so on. It's very much like the series that he did on that subject, which aren't as well known as some of the larger more monumental pieces and his mural paintings and so on.

This other one here [The Sacrifice of Isaac]--

I guess I should leave it right here, that's good enough-- that is another one that I purchased that was so dark with brown varnish over it I thought that the varnish was just through age, but I found that in cleaning it off--I cleaned it myself, thinking that the painting wasn't worth very much, so I cleaned it off myself and discovered that somebody had purposely put that brown varnish on it to hide the fact that the painting underneath was in such poor condition. But it's quite obviously a seventeenth-century Italian work, and I think it might be--I'm now in the process of trying to establish its connection with Bernini, Bernini's work.

In conjunction with these Berninis that I've been trying to establish here, I have this reconstruction in which I have taken this photograph of the sculpture and photograph of the Verita, the figure of Truth, that's in the Galleria Borghese in Rome, and made a composite of them to show how these two, how this figure which in Rome is a marble, a very large, oversize marble, how they coordinate. Actually the model, or I should say the enlarged figure, is 6.66 times the size of the model-- which is kind of a curious difficult reference, and curious in lots of ways. I think that, Marjorie, when you asked me how I found these things, I really don't know. I begin to wonder myself sometimes. As I mentioned

to you early in some of those tapes, I was born on the sixth of June, six o'clock in the morning in 1-9-0-8, which makes eighteen (three times six). There's a movie out that says that's an omen, an ill omen of some kind, but it seems to have something to do with my luck in finding Bernini's work. In any case, there are numerous coordinates in relation to this work which give me to believe that he constructed his models with extreme care. And in many references we find that that's all that he made, was the models. Most of the works that are attributed to Bernini--there are famous works in Rome which are given as his work, and his work in sculpture and in architecture, of course, is largely responsible for the baroque character of Rome. Consequently, I think that we need to go back to the historical references to find that most of these enlarged blowups are really copies of the models that he made. Very few of those over-size and large things are by him, and much of the detail that you see in those is out of the character of--for instance, the way the drapery is treated and ornament and things of that kind are treated, it has much of the character of commercial, decorative ornament, which was undoubtedly done by craftsmen that he could employ. He had as many as thirty assistants at that time; so in a sense he was sort of the Henry Ford of Rome in terms of

production of those enlarged sculptures. So except for the position of the figures and so on, most of those things are replicas of models that he made, with the exception, I think, of some of the portraits and perhaps in some cases In some of those larger things he did some work on the heads and faces and things of that kind, but for the major part they are not by him. But the idea of Time unveiling Truth seems to be kind of a general theme in this whole series of discussions that we've been engaged in in terms of the history of our backgrounds and so on. I think I'm going to get up and sit over here somewhere so we can talk.

ROGERS: I wanted to ask you about the bozzetto itself. If we could get a good tight shot of the bozzetto maybe you could show us a little bit of how the statue of Truth does fit in very nicely with the piece you have there. It's made of wood, isn't it?

JEPSON: Yes, it's made of wood. For some reason, historians find that suspect. And yet one of his earliest known pieces was a pedestal for one of his earliest works which he did while he was still in his teens. And the last work that he did was a six-foot pedestal in wood, in gilded wood, a pedestal for a bust of Christ that he did for Queen Christina. But the pedestal itself, this enlarged figure, large pedestal, had two life-sized--they

say "life"; I read once they called them "life-sized angels"--I don't know what a "life-sized angel" is, but the whole thing is six-foot tall. And these are figures that he unquestionably did as his last work before he died, the year before he died. He died when he was eighty-two years of age. So the span of the period that he worked, where he worked in wood, is quite extensive, and the references to the purchase of wood and things of that kind--it's all there for historians to see. But for some reason they choose to ignore it, and to constantly refer to these replicas and these enlarged blowups that were done by assistants.

ROGERS: Where did you find this piece?

JEPSON: Oh, this? I found this in a shop on La Cienega in about, oh, I think almost ten years ago now, I think I bought this. And that gives you some idea of how long it takes to establish these things, because off and on during that period I've been trying to do research on the antecedents of the work and the iconographic significance of the various figures and things of that kind. So it's taken me considerable time to establish it and finally, I think about 1972, I got a well-known historian in Florence, Alexander Parronchi, to confirm that it was a Bernini and that it was the model for the figure of Time Unveiling Truth.

ROGERS: Dr. Carlo Pedretti has seen this, too, also, hasn't he?

JEPSON: Yes, he has, and he has been very sympathetic in my research and has encouraged me to go ahead, as have several others. I have verbal confirmation that he believes that it is a Bernini; however, the nature of his job requires that he not engage in identifying works, particularly of private collectors.

ROGERS: This is going to be a long-range project for you, I'm sure.

JEPSON: Well, I have a lot of patience, evidently. I'm sort of stubborn about these things, and I put many of these things way back in my mind and sort of pull them out later.

ROGERS: In addition to your research, you've had some contact with universities in the last few years, haven't you?

JEPSON: Oh, yes, particularly [California State University at] Northridge. There are three students there, former students. One, John Canavier, who is a sculptor and who teaches sculpture there. Saul Bernstein, who is a professor of art there who primarily teaches drawing and composition, things of that kind, was a student at the Otis Art Institute. John Canavier was a student of mine when I had my own school, and he was my TA when I taught

at USC for a brief period. [Walter] Gabrielson was a student of mine at--he's now a full professor there, I'm sure--he was a student of mine at the Chouinard Art Institute. So these three people came from three different schools, actually. And Bernstein was the one responsible for getting me to come--he had done some video tapes on me and had me come in and lecture to his students and so on.

Bernstein has also been doing some experimenting with biofeedback in relation to teaching and in relation to his own growth and development. He had been a very extremely conservative person, I would say, more academic in his approach to art, and he got the idea of getting a lie detector as a feedback thing. He discovered, by using that, that students weren't telling the truth about their own feelings about what they liked and what affected them the most and so on. In addition he had learned to hypnotize himself, which he does to keep from doing the kind of stereotype thing which we get into as we grow older. And this, he has found to be extremely helpful.

In addition to that, I've been writing a book on education and the significance of attention awareness in the developmental growth of brain cells. Which is kind of a funny thing for a nonacademic person to be involved in, but this idea that art was an energy-generating activity,

for example, has always been in the back of my mind. And as I go into it more and more, I begin to feel that this is life, that this is really . . . that what life is about, the thing that sustains life or maintains life and keeps us alive and motivated as persons, as creative people, is a basic drive in human beings. Jacques Cousteau says that all organisms are explorers, that they're engaged in exploring, a searching for stimulation, that even a plant, he says, is exploring its environment for nourishment. And this search has taken up a major part of my life, and I would say that because of the lack of scientific evidence to support it, most of the time I was forced to speculate; and naturally I think [what I have] discovered now, as I think back on it now, is something that I had known all along. Every child from the age of six to eleven, let's say, is aware of the significance of being excited about what he does and the kind of feeling of well-being that comes from that kind of stimulation. An example: the other day on the beach Marcia was sitting there and a little boy, a four-year-old, came up beside her, and he picked up a rock and threw it out into the water and said, "This is living," And I think the kind of excitement, of newness, of new experience and awareness of new experience, and the fact that experiences are changing all the time is something that we lose sight

of as we grow older. Certainly from the time of eleven years on, the focus of education is on other things, other directions. And this reward-punishment thing which conditions the person to separate thought from feeling and from action takes over and is a primary cause of a kind of nerve-energy deficiency. Although children can't describe what to do, tacitly they understand a great deal more than we give them credit for. And the more I look into it, the more I think that this is where it is, where it really should start and where it should continue. But the focus on goals and the ends and rewards is a focus away from the nature of experience, here and now. So efforts I've made to try and find a kind of unitary approach would seem to be consistent, would be a common denominator that relates to all life, maybe, and all artists certainly, those who are creative persons. The development of a creative potential, to my mind, focuses and relates to the development of attention-awareness energy. And the fact that this energy is responsible for the content of the nerve cells in the brain and maintains the nerve cells so they don't become empty bags--as I've mentioned earlier in one of those interviews, Holger Hydén referred to unstimulated cells as being "empty bags," even though they appear perfectly normal--and I realized that by attributing creative

behavior or productive behavior to this energy, I am saying that most behavioral problems are due to nerve-energy deficiency, kind of a nerve-energy starvation. And this causes all these other things that come about because of the defense, reward-punishment, that thing which I talked about at length before. It has a way of forcing all our attention to defense mechanisms, which is the easiest part of the brain to condition, and this results in anxiety and a feeling of alienation and separation, lack of identity. These are things which a person who is totally involved and committed in the immediate experiences-- he has no thought about it at all; he's not at all concerned about these things. In any case, that's been my primary interest, and that's what I'm doing now. I have a book in process, and I have a woman who's doing a preliminary editing of it for me. We don't have a publisher yet, but maybe I'll have it published someday, I don't know. Anyway, it's something to do, and it's something I've been wanting to do, and I have always done quite a bit of writing on the side, so I am now devoting more time to that. So that's one of the things that I have been primarily engaged in.

ROGERS: Bernini is rather symbolic for you because your search for the truth and a search for the place for Truth in the statue all seem to go together very nicely,

and I feel perhaps you've already found it.

JEPSON: Well, it's funny. You think you're searching for truth as if it was a unique thing, and then to discover finally that you come to the conclusion that even children understand it better than adults, that you've understood it since you were a child--it's kind of a revelation. It doesn't make us that important, I would doubtless say, but in any case that's what I've been about--that seems important to me.

INDEX

A

Adams, Clinton	35
Alexander, Peter	265
Altoon, John	210-211
Amon Carter Museum of Western Art	197
Amsterdam Stedelijk Museum	239
Archipenko, Alexander	23-24, 27
Arnoldi, Charles	208
Art Center College of Design	35, 184, 253-254, 265
<u>Artforum</u> (periodical)	200
Art Students League, New York	67

B

Baldassari, John	154-155
Barnes, Molly	220
Barney's Beanery	51
Bauhaus	54
Bear, Donald	173
Bear, Esther	173
Bell, Larry	208, 213-215, 257
Bengston, Billy Al	150-151, 152-153, 221
Benton, Thomas Hart	41
Berkey, Frances	63, 64, 147
Bernini, Giovanni Lorenzo	84, 290-292, 294-298, 302
<u>Four Seasons (Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter)</u>	290-291
<u>Time Unveiling Truth</u>	296-298
<u>Verita (Truth)</u>	294-298
Bernstein, Saul	298, 299
Beuys, Joseph	242
Bible	
Book of Revelation	2-3
Bieser, Natalie	208, 215
Biltmore Hotel	36
Biltmore Salon	36
Borghese, Galleria, Rome	294
"Brain Changes in Response to Experience" (Rosenzweig, Bennett, and Diamond)	77-78
Brewer, Donald	211

Brice, Fanny	67
Brice, William	65, 66-67, 70, 135, 137, 162, 172
British Museum	291-292
Brooklyn Museum	
"Art and Technology" exhibition	182
Brown, Edmund G., Jr.	248-249
Burden, Chris	219
Byrnes, James	171-172
C	
<u>Cal Arts Story, The</u> (film)	209, 272
California Association of Private Schools	143, 145-149, 238
California Institute of Technology	123
California Institute of the Arts	28-29, 132-133, 154, 183-189, 203-206, 271-273 235-238
California School of Fine Arts, San Francisco	
California State Board of Education	62
California State University, Long Beach	244
California State University, Northridge	107, 114, 136, 223, 298-299
California Watercolor Society	40-41
Canavier, Elena	278-280
<u>Tidepool</u>	278-280
Canavier, John	114, 136, 223, 246- 247, 298-299
Cézanne, Paul	85
Chamberlin, F. Tolles	15, 19, 36, 55, 61
Charlot, Jean	260, 265
Chicago Art Institute	34, 52-53
Chicago Century of Progress exposition	53-54
Chicago Institute of Design	54
Chouinard, Nelbert Murphy	18, 19-22, 24-26, 27, 31, 37, 43, 54, 65, 68, 69, 132- 133, 197-198, 201, 202
Chouinard Art Institute	15, 17-39, 43-45, 50, 54, 58, 61, 65- 66, 67, 68, 69, 114, 134, 136, 138-139, 140-141, 143, 144,

Chouinard Art Institute [cont'd]	178, 183-189, 194- 215, 223, 228-229, 230, 241, 245-246, 254, 255, 260, 264- 266, 271-273, 283, 288, 299
Christina, Queen of Sweden	296
Clark, Royal	203-204
Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center School	197
Conway Library, University of London	291
Cooper, Ron	264
Coplands, John	199
Copley, Claire	240
Cornwall, Dean	37, 38
Corta, Mary	215
Council on Research in Art Education	202-204
Cousteau, Jacques	300
<u>Craft Horizons</u> (periodical)	158
Cranbrook Academy of Art	243
Cross, Watson	247

D

Dacy, Pat	199
Danz, Louis	72-73
<u>The Psychologist Looks at Art</u>	72-73
Delacroix, Eugène	293
<u>Descent from the Cross</u>	293
Dewey, John	71-73
<u>Art as Experience</u>	71-73
DeYoung, M.H., Memorial Museum	26
Diamond, Harry	201-202
Diamond, Mrs. Harry	201
Dike, Phil	43
Dill, Guy	208, 257
Dill, Laddie	208, 257
Disney, Walt	20, 131-134, 184, 185, 197, 209, 272
Disney, Walt, Studios	20, 131-134, 203- 205, 209, 255
Düsseldorf Staatliche Kunstakademie	242

E

Eames, Charles	285
Einstein, Albert	101, 169
Elks Building, Los Angeles	185

Erdely, Francis de	35, 68-69, 150
Everts, Connor	242-245

F

Fechin, Nikolai	29, 61
Feitelson, Lorser	42, 139-141, 230
Field Museum of Natural History	53
Flax, M., Inc.	146
<u>Frontier</u> (periodical)	199
Fuller Paint Company	152

G

Gabrielson, Walter	299
Garris, Jack	83
GI Bill of Rights	62, 69, 112, 134, 136, 145-149, 237- 238
Gibson, Ted	62, 146
Giradon, Francois	291
Glendale Union High School	5, 14, 15, 16
Gogh, Vincent van	84-85
Goldstein, Jack	188-189, 208, 239- 241, 284
Goode, Joe	208, 213-215
<u>Good Housekeeping</u> (periodical)	16
Graham, Don	265
Griffith Park	6

H

Hahnemann, Samuel	166-167
Haldeman, H.R.	184, 203
Hammersley, Fred	113, 136, 230
Hanson, Mr. _____ (sculptor)	42
Hatfield, Dalzell, Gallery	36, 44
Haworth, Jan	33-34
Haworth, Mariam	33
Henderson, Gil	114
Herter, Albert	38
Hines, Nellie Jepson	3, 9
Hofmann, Hans	22, 25-27
Hydén, Holger	78, 301

I

Irwin, Lucinda Springer	7
Irwin, Mary Elizabeth	
<u>see</u> Jepson, Mary Elizabeth Irwin	

Irwin, Robert	114, 134-135, 136, 155, 196, 200, 212, 257
Irwin, Samuel	7, 8-9

J

Jepson, Elena	14, 160, 276, 288
Jepson, Frank	3, 9
Jepson, Guilia (wife)	34, 79, 112-113
Jepson, Herbert	
<u>The Art of Drawing</u> (film)	87, 209, 210
<u>Fallout</u>	275
Jepson, Herbert Henry	3-4, 5, 6-7, 9-10, 16, 17
Jepson, Isiah Clarkson	6, 7-8
Jepson, Lynn	79, 122
Jepson, Marcia Shlaudeman (wife)	13, 75, 159-161, 215-216, 277-283, 288, 300
Jepson, Mary Elizabeth Irwin	6, 7, 9, 10, 16
Jepson, Neil	32, 34, 79, 112
Jepson, Nick	79-80, 112
Jepson, Stephen	83, 90, 159, 189, 276, 278
Jepson & Wilson Furniture Company	33-34, 52
Jepson Art Institute	25, 33, 58, 59-71, 73, 112-131, 134- 138, 141-143, 145- 149, 159, 161-163, 171-172, 196, 230, 236-238, 263-264, 298

K

Kahn, Frederick	143-145, 149
Kahn Art Institute	143-145, 149
Kanemitsu, Matsumi	273
Kaner, Felicia	192
Kienholz, Edward	143
Knieval, Evel	219

L

Lafitte, Jean	144
Lafitte, Pierre	144-145
La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art	210-211
Langsner, Jules	199

Laporte, Paul	122
Lebrun, Constance (Mrs. Rico)	75
Lebrun, David	75
Lebrun, Elaine (Mrs. Rico)	66
Lebrun, Rico	25, 39, 65-66, 74- 76, 113-115, 120, 129-130, 136-137, 159, 161-163, 173, 176-177, 263-265, 267
Crucifixion series	121, 161
Genesis mural	267
Leider, Philip	200
Leland, Malcolm	223
Levitt, William	238
<u>Life</u> (periodical)	237
Lillibridge, Elsie Jepson	3, 9
Lilly, John	254
Lilly, Tony (Mrs. John)	254
Lockheed Aircraft Corporation	39, 55-59, 144
Long Beach Museum of Art	160
Longman, Lester	117
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors	150, 191, 195
Los Angeles County Museum of Art	16, 35, 40, 134, 170-172, 177, 181- 183, 184
"Art and Technology" exhibition	182
Rubens and Rembrandt exhibition	171-172
<u>Los Angeles Institute of Contemporary Art Journal</u> (periodical)	73, 113-114, 154
Los Angeles Municipal Art Department	149
Los Angeles Public Library	37-38
<u>Los Angeles Times</u> (newspaper)	40
M	
McCoy, Guy	33
Macdonald-Wright, Stanton	42, 68, 73, 114, 138-140
McFee, Henry Lee	67, 137
Mario (bird)	275-277
Marisol, Escobar	137-138
Masaccio	38
Mason, John	150-151
Matisse, Henri	36
May Company	184

Michelangelo	177, 219
Sistine Chapel	177
Millier, Arthur	40
Moore, Bill	29
Mostel, Zero	135-136
Murphy, Laurence	26-27
Murphy, Nelbert	
see Chouinard, Nelbert Murphy	
Museum of Modern Art, New York	182, 220
"Art and Technology"	182
exhibition	
<u>Myth of the Hyperactive Child, The</u>	249-250
(Schrag)	

N

National Endowment for the Arts	279
<u>Natural Way to Draw, The</u> (book)	165
Nelson, Ken	209-210
Teton Marsh	209
New York University	126
Nixon, Richard M.	184
Nordland, Gerald	133, 199-200, 205-206
Northrop Aircraft Corporation	145

O

Orozco, José Clemente	41, 260
Prometheus mural	260
O'Shea, Terry	208
Otis Art Institute	20, 34, 35, 46, 48-50, 60, 69, 122, 131, 141, 149-156, 171, 178, 184, 185, 189-191, 192, 194-195, 223-224, 265, 298

P

Parronchi, Alexander	297
Patterson, Patty	20
Pauling, Linus	202-203
Pedretti, Carlo	298
Pepperdine University	186
Perls, Frank, Gallery	252
Picasso, Pablo	37, 67, 217, 219
<u>Guernica</u>	37

Pomona College	238, 239, 260, 267
Genesis mural	267
Prometheus mural (Orozco)	260
Price, Kenneth	150-151
Ptaszynski, William R.	142
Ptaszynski, Mrs. William R.	142
R	
Read, Herbert	72, 123, 125-126
<u>Education through Art</u>	72, 123, 125-126
Reichenbach, Hans	163
Rembrandt van Rijn	171, 219
Renoir, Pierre	85
Rocque, Milly	61, 120-123, 125, 127, 129, 135, 162, 223
Rogers, Carl	123
Ross, Kenneth	49, 149
Royal Library, London	291
Ruben, Richards	196-197, 200, 212, 261
Rubens, Peter Paul	171
Ruscha, Ed	208, 215
Russell, Morgan	68, 138
S	
<u>Sacrifice of Isaac, The</u> (painting)	293-294
San Francisco Museum of Art	160
Santa Barbara Museum of Art	173
Santa Monica City Hall	140
Santa Monica Public Library	140
Scheyer, Galka	36
Blue Four collection	36
<u>Science and Sanity</u> (Korzybski)	73, 163
<u>Scientific American</u> (periodical)	99-100
Scripps College	68
Sheets, Millard	43-50, 68, 104-105, 149-150, 152, 156, 190, 195, 212
Shlaudeman, Marcia	
see Jepson, Marcia Shlaudeman	
Sibelius, Jean	232
Silvey, Irving	115
Siqueiros, David Alfaro	24-25, 260, 261
Slivka, Rose	158
Springer family	7

Standard Oil Corporation of New Jersey	202
Stendahl, Earl, Gallery	36, 37
T	
Tamayo, Rufino	252
U	
"Ulcers in Executive Monkeys" (article)	99-100
U.S. Central Intelligence Agency	145
U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation	145
U.S. General Accounting Office	147-148
U.S. Veterans Administration	69, 143, 145-149
U.S. Work Projects Administration (WPA)	42, 139-140
University of California, Berkeley	157
University of California, Los Angeles	35, 141, 155, 202
University of California, Riverside	243
University of California, Santa Barbara	142
University of Iowa	117
University of New Mexico	230
University of Southern California	34-35, 61, 148, 150, 186, 203, 299
V	
Valentine, DeWain	228-229, 266
Valentiner, William	171, 173
Vatican	176-177
Versailles Palace	291
Victoria and Albert Museum	170, 175, 291
Vincent, John	202, 203
Von Heune, Stephan	28, 273
Voulkos, Peter	49, 150-152, 153, 155-158
W	
Warshaw, Howard	65, 67, 115-123, 127, 129, 130-131, 135, 137, 161-163, 216, 281-282
Watkins, Mr. _____ (art instructor)	53

Western Association of Museum Directors	173
Western Association of Schools and Colleges	183
Wheeler, Douglas	208-209, 210, 215
Wilder, Mitchell	197, 198-199, 255
Wilson, Laurence	33
Winner, Helene	238-239
With, Karl	141, 174
Wood, Grant	41
World's Fair (1934), Chicago	53-54
Wudl, Tom	208

